

The emergence, crystallization and shattering of
a right-wing alternative to Congress nationalism
—the All-India Hindu Mahasabha, 1937-52

Keith Meadowcroft

A Thesis in the
Department of History

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (History) at

Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

September 2003

© Keith Meadowcroft, 2003



National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-85256-3

Canada

ABSTRACT

The emergence, crystallization and shattering of a right-wing alternative to Congress nationalism —the All-India Hindu Mahasabha, 1937-52

Keith Meadowcroft, Ph.D.
Concordia University, 2003

This study traces the rise and fall of the first, all-India, Hindu nationalist or supremacist political party, the Hindu Mahasabha. It seeks to situate the Hindu Mahasabha in the political and social landscape of India by documenting the Mahasabha's actions and interaction with the British colonial regime, the Indian National Congress and other political forces. By so doing, it seeks to draw out what social and political groups gravitated toward Hindu nationalism and toward what end. A key conclusion is that the Hindu Mahasabha's late 1930's transformation from an organization ostensibly dedicated to Hindu unity and uplift into a political party advocating Hindu Raj was not simply a product of increasing communal-political polarization. The Mahasabha's transformation was also bound up with fears among India's propertied classes as to the emergence of socialist currents in and around the Congress and growing worker and peasant struggles.

This study documents the close collaboration between the Hindu Mahasabha and the British colonial regime during World War II and the Mahasabha's subsequent involvement in the attempts of the landlords, princes and other elite layers to oppose India's emerging bourgeois-democratic political order. It shows that in 1947-48 and again in 1950, the Hindu Mahasabha emerged, in the named of *Hindu Raj* and *Akhand Hindusthan*, as the ideologue of ethnic-cleansing.

Much of this dissertation is devoted to untangling the complex relationship between the Mahasabha and the Indian National Congress. It argues against facile approaches which either deny any antagonism between the two parties or maintain that the Congress was a secular organization that resolutely and consistently resisted Hindu nationalist pressure.

Acknowledgements

Quest, odyssey, ordeal—during the course of writing this thesis I have accumulated numerous debts—financial, scholarly and personal. I must begin by acknowledging financial support from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council, the Fonds FCAR (now renamed the Fonds de recherche sur la société et la culture), the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute and Concordia University. Dr. John Hill, my supervisor, was supportive throughout. He never wavered in his faith in this project even when my writing was proceeding at a glacial pace and I was pursuing lines of inquiry tangential to a history of the Hindu Mahasabha. Many others in the History Department also helped, but I would like to especially thank Doctors Ronald Rudin and Mike Mason and the department secretaries Donna and Darleen. The personnel at Inter-Library Loan went above and beyond the call of duty in ferreting out rare, pre-independence Indian publications. I received generous assistance from the personnel at many other institutions, but especially the staff of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

Rohan D'Souza helped me survive my Indian adventure, putting up with a less than model house-guest and encouraging me in my battles with the UP state bureaucracy. Ram, Bulbul, Joseph, Manju, and other Indian friends provided a warm, generous and challenging intellectual environment. It was Wije, Ratnayake, Rohantha, and the late Keerthi B., all of Sri Lanka, who first sparked my interest in South Asia. Needless to say, they encouraged me to see this project through to the end.

Carey Watt is no South Asian, but I owe him thanks for help provided in India, Cambridge and Canada. There is not space enough to mention all the other North American friends who provided shelter, encouragement, financial help, and/or intellectual stimulation, but mention must be made of Heather and David Green, Linda (technically an Australian), Lee Wildgen, and my baby-sitter of last resort, Guy Charron.

Dr. Barbara Meadowcroft was an ever-vigilant proof-reader and trenchant critic of meandering sentences. This thesis would never have been concluded without the support of my long-suffering Penelope: Maria-Elena Grijalva Barba.

Needless to say, none of the aforementioned are responsible for any errors in the text, nor its bulk.

Table of Contents

Part One: Situating the Hindu Mahasabha

Chapter 1: The Hindu Mahasabha in Indian history and historiography	1
I: The Mahasabha's emergence as a Hindu nationalist rival to the Congress	
II: Communalism and communal political identities	
III: More on the aims and parameters of this study	
Chapter 2: V.D. Savarkar and the transformation of the Hindu Mahasabha into a communal political party, 1937-39	42
I: The crisis in the Mahasabha in the middle 1930s	
II: The 1937 elections—a watershed in Indian politics	
III: Savarkar and the essentials of <i>Hindutva</i>	
IV: The political and organizational consolidation of the Mahasabha	

Part Two: The Anglo-Hindu Alliance in Practice—the Hindu Mahasabha during World War II

Introduction to Part Two	102
Chapter 3: “Militarize all Hindus and Hinduize all Politics”—the Hindu Mahasabha and the British Raj, 1939-41	107
I: The Mahasabha, the colonial regime and the Second World War	
II: Savarkar's war policy and the Mahasabha's political trajectory	
III: The Mahasabha's 1941 “direct action” debate: From the threat at Madura to the “Epic Struggle” of Bhaglapur	
Chapter 4: The Hindu Mahasabha and the Quit India Rebellion	157
Chapter 5: Whither the Hindu Mahasabha? The trials and tribulations of India's “Third Force” in Quit India's aftermath	184
I: The Mahasabha's “National Demand”	

- II: Independence or the “higher ideal” of *Hindu Rashtra* ?
- III: The Mahasabha-Muslim League negotiations
- IV: The Mahasabha’s Cawnpore session and the alleged plot to “waylay” the Mahasabha
- V: Savarkar, the Mahasabha and Gandhi’s 1943 fast

Part Three: Thrice Thwarted—the Hindu Mahasabha unravels, 1945-52

Introduction to Part Three	248
Chapter 6: Marginalization amidst mounting communal and class strife —the short reign of S.P. Mookerjee	250
Chapter 7: The Hindu Mahasabha and India’s new political order, Part One— Communal fury, Partition, and the radicalization of the Mahasabha	292
I: Mass communal violence and the Mahasabha’s resurgence	
II: The Mahasabha, the transfer of power and the partition of British India	
III: Mahasabha “direct action” and the death rattle of the UP aristocracy	
IV: The Mahasabha and the erosion of princely power	
Chapter 8: The Hindu Mahasabha and India’s new political order, Part Two— Communal fury, Gandhi’s assassination and the shattering of the Mahasabha	350
I: Contenders for power ? The <i>Hindutva</i> -ites on the offensive	
II: The Mahasabha and the assassination of M.K. Gandhi	
III: An ultimate attempt to revive the Mahasabha	
Chapter 9: Conclusion	415
Appendix I: List of Abbreviations and a Note on Spelling	426
Appendix II: Glossary	428
Bibliography	432

Chapter 1: The Hindu Mahasabha in Indian history and historiography

The Bharatiya Janata Party or BJP has been the dominant force in India's Union government since 1998. In its current form, the BJP has existed for only two decades, yet its political lineage can be traced to two organizations active in colonial India—the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the All-India Hindu Mahasabha. The RSS has long been the principal exponent of a Hindu nationalist or supremacist view of the Indian polity. Whilst there is much debate about the RSS's relation to Hindu religious revivalism and why support for the RSS has swelled in recent decades, no one disputes its importance to contemporary Indian politics. Both India's Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and Home Minister, L.K. Advani, are RSS members and have been since their youth. Not surprisingly, there is a large and rapidly expanding scholarly literature devoted to exploring the RSS's role in formulating and popularizing Hindu nationalism.

The Hindu Mahasabha is, by contrast, a ghost: a ghost in contemporary Indian political life—it has not held a seat in India's parliament since the 1970s; but also a ghost in Indian historiography. The name of the Mahasabha is frequently invoked in historical writing on the last decade of British rule as evidence of the communal political polarization that climaxed in Partition and the growing menace of Hindu communalism. Of the substance of the Mahasabha's activities and its relations with other key actors, however, little, if anything, is ever said. In 1969 a student of contemporary Indian politics called the absence of scholarly work on the Hindu Mahasabha “one of the serious gaps in pre-independence Indian history.”¹ The passage of three decades and the enormous

¹ Craig Baxter, *The Jana Sangh: A Biography of an Indian Political Party* (Bombay: OUP, 1971) 3.

increase in articles and monographs on the history of twentieth century South Asia have only made this gap more glaring.²

From the late 1930s to the first post-independence elections, the Mahasabha was India's principal Hindu nationalist party. In newspapers, public meetings and election campaigns, the Mahasabhites railed against the Indian National Congress' liberal-territorial definition of the Indian polity. The Hindus of India, they baldly asserted, constitute a nation unto themselves and this nation is congruent with the Indian nation. Muslims and Christians should be accorded citizenship rights only to the extent that they accept Hindu supremacy. "The first and fundamental difference between the philosophy of the Indian National Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha," declared a Mahasabha pamphleteer, "concerns our Mother-land."

We cannot take this country [as] jointly owned by those who either came running away from countries and sought protection here or those descendants of ex-Hindus, who for the greed of power and money or out of fear renounced their glorious faith and became converts, or those who are the descendants of those barbarous invaders who spoiled our very scared land, demolished our sacred temples and forcibly kidnapped thousands and lacs of our Mothers and Sisters. Of course, the country cannot belong to them and if they are to live here, they must live here taking it for granted that the [sic] Hindusthan is the land of the Hindus and no one else.³

The British, albeit for their own purposes, proclaimed the Mahasabha India's third great political organization at the beginning of World War II and in 1942 gave it representation on British India's Executive Council. M.A. Jinnah and other leaders of the

² To this day, the standard reference work on the Hindu Mahasabha is an official history penned by longtime Mahasabha propagandist Indra Prakash. Published in 1938 and in revised editions in 1952 and 1966, Prakash's is a highly colored and at times confusing account that is far more useful as an artifact of Mahasabha ideology than as a source of information about its role in Indian politics. (Indra Prakash, *A Review of the History & Work of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Hindu Sangathan Movement*, New Delhi: the Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha, and in a revised edition in 1952; *Hindu Mahasabha: Its Contribution to India's Politics*, New Delhi: Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha, 1966.

³ Indra Prakash, *Where We Differ: The Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha* (New Delhi: Hindu Mission Pustak Bhandar, 1942) 66-67.

Muslim League pointed to the Mahasabha as proof of the impossibility of Hindus and Muslims co-existing in the same state. Fears of the Mahasabha's potential to rally Hindu support frequently figured in the calculations of the Indian National Congress and caused it to name a Mahasabha leader to independent India's first cabinet. The Mahasabha collaborated with the Congress in the 1947 campaign to partition Bengal and Vallabhbhai Patel, Jawaharlal Nehru's right-wing rival for the Congress leadership, entertained hopes of incorporating it into India's new ruling party. But the Mahasabha came into headlong conflict with India's post-independence government. The Mahasabha's agitation for India to be transformed into a Hindu *Raj* and for Pakistan's re-absorption into an *Akhand Hindusthan* (Undivided India) made it, in Nehru's estimation, the main opposition to the Congress-led government and the greatest threat to India's fledgling liberal-democratic polity.

Unquestionably the Hindu Mahasabha's lack of success is a major reason scholars have accorded it little attention. Despite its pretensions to speak for India's Hindus, the Mahasabha was routed in successive elections in pre- and post-independence India. In the first *Lok Sabha* election, held in the winter of 1951-52, it barely won a million votes and, consequently, failed to win recognition as a national political party.

The lack of scholarly interest in the Hindu Mahasabha is also bound up with the elisions of the major schools of modern South Asian historiography. Elucidation of the Hindu Mahasabha's complex relationship to the Indian National Congress (INC) would throw into question key assumptions of both the Indian and Pakistani national historical schools. Indian nationalist historians have insisted on the INC's commitment to a secular, territorial definition of the Indian nation and its opposition to all forms of communalism.

Pakistani historians, on the other hand, repeat the charges of contemporary Muslim League leaders that the Congress systematically discriminated against Muslims and covertly practiced what the Mahasabha preached. As we shall see, during the fifteen year period that forms the focus of this dissertation, the Mahasabha was both a visceral opponent of the Congress—M.K. Gandhi's assassins were Mahasabhites—and a sometime ally.

Leftist historians, particularly over the past two decades, have focused their efforts on illuminating the agency of subaltern groups and, consequently, have shunned the study of elite organizations like the Hindu Mahasabha. This dissertation takes exception to such a simplistic understanding of class dynamics. Lower-class and -caste ferment impacted significantly on the Mahasabha. Study of the elite-oriented Hindu Mahasabha provides us with a window not only into the politics of privileged groups of Hindus—particularly the landlords, princes, and urban petty bourgeoisie—but also a refracted view of the development of Indian society as a whole.

Nor does the Mahasabha readily fit into the research agenda of the British school of Indian historiography. The Mahasabha's most enduring impact was in articulating and disseminating an alternate vision of the Indian polity. Yet British historians of the *Raj* have seldom prioritized the study of political programs and ideological currents, since most adhere to the view that political ideologies are nothing more than a mask for the struggle for immediate socio-economic interests.

Even the recent outpouring of articles and monographs prompted by the growing strength of the BJP and specifically devoted to explicating Hindu nationalism has done little to advance our knowledge of the Hindu Mahasabha per se. The most important

published writings of V.D. Savarkar—the Mahasabha’s president from 1938 through 1944 and the principal ideologue of *Hindutva*—have been perused and deconstructed. Scholars now routinely refer to such seminal statements of Hindu communal-political discourse as U.N. Mukherji’s *A Dying Race*, Swami Shradhannand’s *Hindu Sangathan: Saviour of the Dying Race*, and M.S. Golwalkar’s *We, or Our Nationhood Defined*.⁴ But if we are to trace the emergence and evolution of Hindu nationalism in 20th century South Asia, it is necessary to examine how notions of Hindus having separate political interests and constituting a distinct nation took root. What groups gravitated toward them and to what end? How did these ideas come to inform political action and ultimately to be incorporated into the program of the Hindu Mahasabha? What impact did the Mahasabha have and why did it fail?

This writer has no brief for the Punjabi Congressman and Hindu Mahasabha leader Lala Lajpat Rai. Even while conceding that the communal violence of the 1920s had its roots in a struggle for “loaves and fishes” among the propertied classes, he urged his Hindu compatriots to “move every nerve to be communally efficient.”⁵ Yet Lajpat Rai exemplifies the shifting, ambivalent and ambiguous attitude of many Indian nationalists to emerging communal-political identities. Speaking in 1909 at the founding conference of the Punjab Hindu Sabha, Lajpat Rai declared Hindus to be culturally a nation unto themselves.⁶ During the post-World War One upsurge against British rule, he was an advocate of Hindu-Muslim unity. The newspaper he edited warned its readers that the

⁴ U.N. Mukherji, *A Dying Race* (Calcutta: 1910; copy at National Library, Calcutta); Swami Shradhannand, *Hindu Sangathan: Saviour of the Dying Race* (Delhi: Arjun Press, 1926) and M.S. Golwalkar, *We, or Our Nationhood Defined* (Nagpur: Bharat Prakashan, 1939).

⁵ *Lala Lajpat Rai Writings and Speeches*, Vol. 2, ed. Vijaya Chandra Joshi (Delhi: University Publishers, 1966) 253.

⁶ As cited in Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India* (New York: Columbia, 1996) 18-19

British Indian government was spreading exaggerated reports of the violence inflicted on Hindus during the Malabar (Moplah) peasant rebellion in order to stoke communal animosities.⁷ Shaken by the communal riots of 1922-24, Lajpat Rai later penned a series of inflammatory articles in which he questioned the feasibility of Hindu-Muslim unity and suggested that the Punjab might have to be partitioned to create a Hindu-Sikh dominated province of East Punjab and a predominantly Muslim West Punjab within a greater India.⁸ During the last weeks of his life, Lajpat Rai battled elements in the Punjab Hindu Sabha who opposed the nationalist boycott of the Simon Commission on the grounds that the boycott would allow Muslims to obtain government favors. “I don’t want the Hindus to call themselves a *qaum* [nation],” Lajpat Rai told an October 1927 Mahasabha conference, in what proved to be his last major public address.⁹

Joya Chatterjee’s *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947* is possibly unique in contextualizing the study of the development of a Hindu communal political identity. But her focus is on the politics of the Bengali *bhadralok* (literally the “better people”—the propertied, western-educated Hindu, middle and upper class that emerged in colonial Bengal). Christophe Jaffrelot’s *Hindu Nationalism in the Twentieth Century* is an important work that is animated by an historical approach. But Jaffrelot’s principal concern is with the RSS and developments in the post-1947 period. Moreover, having delimited his subject as Hindu nationalism, he glosses over the complex process, stretching over more than fifteen years, whereby elements long-associated with the Indian National Congress coalesced with others outside the Congress

⁷ G.R. Thursby, *Hindu-Muslim Relations in British India. A Study of Controversy, Conflict, and Communal Movements in Northern India, 1923-1928* (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1975) 139.

⁸ *Lajpat Rai Writings*, Vol. 2, 170-22, especially 210 and 212-213.

⁹ *Lajpat Rai Writings*, Vol. 2, 453.

in recasting the Hindu Mahasabha as a political party championing a radically different vision of the Indian polity.¹⁰ This process, however, is important if we are to understand the political interests that found articulation in Hindu nationalism. The growth and radicalization of Hindu communal sentiment was, as shall be illustrated repeatedly in the course of this work, bound up with the apprehensions of sections of propertied Hindus over the Congress' attempt to pressure the *Raj* through civil disobedience and appeals to popular socio-economic grievances.

A key concern that animates this thesis is the need to situate the Hindu Mahasabha in the political and social landscape of India. Towards this end, much attention has been given to tracing the Mahasabha's crystallization into a communal political party and its role in the turbulent years preceding and immediately following the 1947 Independence and Partition of India, including how the Mahasabha interacted with the colonial state and rival parties and its internal debates and divisions.

Before proceeding, one caution is necessary. The Hindu Mahasabha and Hindu nationalism developed in interactive relation with Muslim communal politics and mobilization. Each side fed off the angers and fears excited by the other. In Chapter 2, I explore the parallel radicalization of the Mahasabha and the Muslim League in the aftermath of the 1937 provincial elections. Otherwise, for the sake of concision and cogency, I have kept discussion of the actions of the Hindu Mahasabha's Muslim communal political adversaries to a bare minimum. Hateful as were many of the statements and actions of the Hindu Mahasabha, the reader should not forget they were frequently provoked or answered by communalism of a like kind.

¹⁰ Joya Chatterjee, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947* (New Delhi: CUP, 1995); Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India* (New York: Columbia, 1996).

I: The Mahasabha's emergence as a Hindu Nationalist rival to the Congress

The Hindu Mahasabha did not begin its life as a political party, let alone one claiming that the Indian nation was comprised exclusively of Hindus. Depending on whether one dates the Mahasabha's birth from 1915, when it was formally established, or 1922, when it was revived, the Mahasabha had existed for close to a quarter-century or a decade-and-a-half before it crystallized into a political party with its own program and vision of the Indian polity. Only in the late 1930s, after V.D. Savarkar had assumed the Mahasabha's helm, did it proclaim politics to be its principal vocation. "The Mahasabha," declared Savarkar in his first address as its president, "is not in the main a Hindu-Dharma-Sabha but it is pre-eminently a Hindu-Rashtra-Sabha and is a Pan-Hindu organization shaping the destiny of the Hindu nation in all its social, political and cultural aspects."¹¹

The Mahasabha's transformation from an avowedly social-cultural organization dedicated to revitalizing the Hindu community into a Hindu nationalist political party was a complex, protracted and uneven process that involved a struggle of tendencies, changes in personnel, and shifts in its leaders' and cadres' political beliefs and agendas.¹²

Chapter 2 will show that the Mahasabha's transformation was bound up with a series of pivotal changes in the Indian political situation in the middle and late 1930s. But the Mahasabha's metamorphosis was also the outcome of a process of communal-political polarization and radicalization that can be traced back to the Mahasabha's revival in the early 1920s.

¹¹ V.D. Savarkar, *Samagra Savarkar Wangmaya—Writings of Swatantrya Veer V.D. Savarkar*, V. 6 (Poona: Maharashtra Prantik Hindusabha, 1964) 283. Hereafter, *Savarkar Writings*.

¹² My "From 'Hindu-Muslim Unity' to 'Hindu Raj': The Evolution of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha, 1922-1939" (M.A. diss., Concordia University, 1995) was an initial attempt to chart this process. The discussion of the Mahasabha's pre-1937 history that follows is largely drawn from it.

Between 1922 and 1937 the post of Mahasabha Working President passed from Madan Mohan Malaviya, to B.S. Moonje, and then Bhai Parmanand. This succession is illustrative of the Mahasabha's trajectory, for each was more communally radical or extreme than his predecessor.

A Congressman since 1886, Malaviya was among the premier leaders of the Indian national movement when he spearheaded the Mahasabha's revival during the period of communal recrimination that followed the collapse of the first non-cooperation movement. Malaviya professed agreement with the Gandhi-led Congress' insistence that Hindu-Muslim unity was a prerequisite for *swaraj* or independence. Yet from the Mahasabha rostrum he promoted Hindu assertion, including aggressive proselytization, campaigns to stop cow-killing and uphold and expand Hindu rights to play music near mosques, and the organization and training of Hindus for communal self-defence. Hindu-Muslim unity would never be securely established, argued Malaviya, until the Hindus were sufficiently strong that "the rowdy section among the Mohammedans" dared "not rob or dishonour" them.¹³ Malaviya used the Mahasabha as a factional tool in his struggle with the Nehru family for control of the Congress in the United Provinces. This was especially evident during the campaign for the 1926 legislative council elections when the Hindu Sabhas mustered support for Malaviya's Independent Congress Party. Yet Malaviya opposed calls for the Mahasabha to itself contest the elections and this for two reasons. Notwithstanding his role in stoking communal conflict, Malaviya remained loyal to the Congress and to an early nationalist vision of a composite Indian nation constructed of discrete religious communities. He wanted to preserve the Mahasabha as a

¹³ As cited by M. Hasan, *Nationalism and Communal Politics in India, 1885-1930* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1991) 242.

platform uniting Hindus of all religious traditions and political stripes, believing such an organization was needed to promote Hindu culture and solidarity and to pressure the British and the Congress to uphold Hindu rights and interests.

B.S. Moonje assumed the Mahasabha presidency in 1927 and served as its Working President almost without interruption till 1933. A Maharashtran Brahmin, Moonje had a long Congress career, although not nearly as long or illustrious as Malaviya's. The Nagpur lieutenant of the Extremist leader B.G. Tilak, Moonje emerged in the early 1920s as the most-powerful Congress politician in the Central Provinces. Moonje was more truculent than Malaviya. To his predecessor's dismay, Moonje led the Mahasabha in rebelling against a Congress attempt in the late 1920s to forge a communal settlement with the Muslim political elite. Moonje placed especial emphasis on the organizing of Hindu "self-defence" corps and military training. RSS founder and *sarsangchalak* (supreme leader) Keshav Baliram Hedgewar was a Moonje protégé (for many years Hedgewar lived in Moonje's family compound) and Moonje is himself reputed to have been one of the five founding members of the RSS.¹⁴

During Moonje's presidency the Mahasabha no longer even paid lip service to the need for Hindu-Muslim unity. "Leave the Muslims severely alone," Moonje counselled, "so that they might realize their folly and in dejection ... throw themselves at our feet."¹⁵ Moonje defied the Congress boycott of the first and third sessions of the Round Table Conference on reforming India's constitution, for fear that if "Hindu interests" were not vigorously asserted, the Muslim political elite would win an inordinate share of any

¹⁴ K.R. Malkani, *The RSS Story* (New Delhi: Impex, 1980) 115; Tapan Basu et al, *Khaki Shorts, Saffron Flags: A Critique of the Hindu Right* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993) 11.

¹⁵ As cited in K.K. Aziz, *History Of Partition of India: Origin and Development of the Idea of Pakistan*, V. 2, (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1988) 139-40.

British concessions. Yet even after he lost his position within the Congress leadership, Moonje continued to oppose, if only on pragmatic grounds, the Mahasabha challenging the Congress in its own name. The Mahasabha, he wrote in 1932, “generally leaves politics to the Indian National Congress but reserves to itself the right of interfering in politics to prevent any special encroachments on the [sic] Hindu rights by other communities ...”¹⁶

Bhai Parmanand, a Punjabi and an Arya Samajist, was long the most important advocate of Hindu nationalism within the Mahasabha leadership. Unlike Malaviya and Moonje, Parmanand never had more than a fleeting association with the Indian National Congress. At the Mahasabha’s 1926 session, he led the push for the Mahasabha to stand candidates in its own name in opposition to the Congress-backed Swaraj Party. The following year, to the dismay of Congress and Hindu Mahasabha leader Lajpat Rai, he prevailed on the Punjab Hindu Sabha to defy the nationalist boycott of the Simon Commission .

Parmanand’s aim on taking the Mahasabha helm in 1933 was to work for its transformation into a self-conscious political body. The preceding year he had secured an amendment to the Mahasabha constitution pledging it to uphold the interests of the Hindu *Rashtra* or nation. In his maiden presidential address he denounced the Congress for its “revolutionary” views and suggested that if the British were to show the Hindus more favor an Anglo-Hindu alliance could be forged within the Empire. But as we shall see in Chapter 2, Parmanand found himself constrained by the continuing Congress allegiance

¹⁶ B.S. Moonje, “Report on Lisbon Mission,” *Dharmaveer Dr. B.S. Moonje Commemoration Volume. Birth Centenary 1872-1972*, eds. N.G. Dixit et al, (Nagpur: Centenary Celebration Committee, 1972) 109.

of many in the Mahasabha leadership and the practicalities of mounting a broad-based opposition to the British government's Communal Award.

In 1935-1936 Parmanand and Malaviya fought for control of the Mahasabha. One reason that Parmanand prevailed was that Moonje and other prominent Maharashtran Mahasabhites ultimately switched camps. But the struggle left the Mahasabha badly bruised. It would fall to Savarkar to revive and reorganize the Mahasabha as a political party.

From Hindu *Sangathan* to *Hindutva*

Further light on the Mahasabha's long-term evolution can be shed by looking at it from three vantage points—the “politicization” of the Mahasabha; the Mahasabha's growing estrangement from the Indian National Congress; and the Mahasabha's programmatic shift from Hindu *sangathan* to *Hindutva*.

In speaking of the Mahasabha's politicization I do not mean to suggest that we should accept the claims of Malaviya and others involved in the Mahasabha's re-launch in 1922-23 that theirs was a politically disinterested organization. The program the Mahasabha elaborated in the 1920s—Hindu *sangathan* and in particular the struggle for Hindu numerical-political strength—had, as I shall show below, a very definite political thrust. But the distinction between an implicit and an explicit political vocation is not without importance.

Only gradually did India's political elite become conscious that it had been drawn into a communal-political power struggle and even then the reasons why such a conflict had emerged, its relative importance, and how it should be resolved were subject to continuous re-evaluation by a wide array of actors. In the case of the Mahasabha, its

growing self-consciousness as a political organization was bound up with changes in its cadres' attitudes to the Congress, the British *Raj* and the definition of the Indian nation.

The revived Mahasabha, began by asserting a need for Hindu organization and solidarity, arguing that only if the Hindus were strong and self-confident could they forge a genuine and enduring alliance with India's Muslims. Then it laid claim to a role in articulating and upholding what it termed Hindu political demands. These included demands for the unfettered right to mount religious processions, but centered around securing a "just" communal share of seats in legislative bodies, public service jobs and government contracts. In moving a resolution at the Mahasabha's 1924 session to strike a committee to elaborate Hindu political demands, the south Indian Congress politician S. Satyamurti said the Mahasabha "was for the first time giving a distinct political orientation to the activities of the Hindu Mahasabha. The Sabha would not only be confined to the social and religious uplift of the Hindus ..."¹⁷

By the late 1920s the Mahsabshites were asserting that their organization, not the Congress, was the appropriate body to conduct communal negotiations with the Muslim political elite and that no communal settlement would be binding on the Hindus unless endorsed by the Mahasabha. With the adoption of Savarkar's *Hindutva* doctrine the Mahasabha declared itself first and foremost a political body. The Hindu Mahasabha, its December 1938 annual session declared, "is the only national organization in the Country ... there is no other national politics than that of the Hindu Sabha for the country as a whole and the Hindus particularly."¹⁸

¹⁷ As cited in S.R. Bakshi, *Madan Mohan Malaviya: The Man and his Ideology* (New Delhi: Amol Publications, 1991) 102.

¹⁸ *Hindu Outlook*, 11 January 1939.

A second way of conceptualizing the Mahasabha's evolution is from the standpoint of its growing estrangement from the Congress. Here we need to introduce an important qualification: in keeping with its mission to promote Hindu unity, the Mahasabha always included significant numbers of non-Congressmen, including prominent Congress adversaries. As President of its 1926 annual session, the Mahasabha chose Raja Narendra Nath, a Punjabi politician and former *Raj* official well-known for his loyalist or conservative, pro-government views. In the United Provinces, many big landlords were Mahasabha patrons.

Nonetheless, most of the principal Mahasabha leaders in the 1920s were nationally-known Congress politicians. These included Malaviya, the aforementioned "Lion of the Punjab" Lajpat Rai, and a quartet of former lieutenants of the Congress Extremist leader B.G. Tilak representing Maharashtra's various regions—Moonje (Nagpur), N.C. Kelkar (Poona), M.S. Aney (Berar), and M.R. Jayakar (Bombay City). So great was the overlap between the Mahasabha and Congress that between 1923 and 1926 the Mahasabha thrice met in the *pandal* the Congress had erected for its annual session.

Elsewhere I have argued that the Mahasabha became a redoubt for Congress leaders who had misgivings about the importance the 1920s Congress attached to forging Hindu-Muslim unity and Gandhi's non-cooperation strategy, which involved both the boycott of *Raj* institutions and mass civil disobedience. Indeed, the two misgivings were closely linked. With increasing vigour, the Mahasabhites accused the Congress of "appeasing" the Muslims. In their view, the Congress failed to vigorously uphold Hindu interests in conflicts over the communal allocation of seats, jobs and other forms of patronage. Non-cooperation, meanwhile, was attacked because it meant that the Hindu

cause was left undefended in government *fora*, thus giving, or so claimed the Mahasabhites, their Muslim communal political rivals the upper hand. For many Mahasabhites, a second no less important objection to Gandhian non-cooperation was that it legitimized “law-breaking” among the masses. Even when the Mahasabhites functioned within the Congress, explained Hindu Mahasabha Office Secretary G.V. Ketkar in a 1941 essay, “they formed a group in favour of the parliamentary and constitutional activities and against Non-cooperation policy and Gandhism in general.”¹⁹

During the late 1920s and 1930s, the Congress Mahasabhites rebelled with increasing frequency against the authority of the Congress. Only with great reluctance did the Tilakites participate in the 1930 Non-Cooperation campaign.²⁰ Two years later, the Mahasabha failed to condemn the wave of repression the *Raj* launched against the Congress when it again resorted to mass civil disobedience.

The Mahasabha’s post-1937 emergence as a political rival of the Congress was anticipated by developments in the Punjab in the late 1920s. Following the death of Lajpat Rai, the Hindu Mahasabhites in the Punjab legislature formed an anti-Congress grouping, the National Progressive Party (NPP), that advocated and practiced cooperation with the *Raj*. From the late 1920s, an NPP leader invariably held a portfolio in the Punjab government.

¹⁹ G.V. Ketkar, “The All India Hindu Maha Sabha: Its Aims and Present Policy,” *IAR*, I, 1941: 278.

²⁰ For simplicity sake, I have used the label “Tilakites” to designate a group of Maharashtran politicians who in opposing Gandhi claimed to be upholding Tilak’s political tradition and ultimately transferred their political allegiance from the Congress to the Hindu Mahasabha. Moonje is the most important representative of this grouping, but it also included such figures as L.B. Bhopatkar, G.V. Ketkar, D.V. Gokhale and B.G. Kharpade. At Tilak’s death in 1920, his principal regional lieutenants were Moonje, M.R. Jayakar, N.C. Kelkar and M.S. Aney. The latter three were also all long-active in the Hindu Mahasabha and had varying degrees of sympathy for it after it metamorphosed into a Hindu nationalist political party. But unlike Moonje, they did not play an active role in Savarkar’s Hindu Mahasabha.

A second aspect of the Mahasabha's estrangement from the Congress that warrants consideration is the separation of increasing numbers of Congressmen from the Mahasabha. As the gulf between the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha grew during the 1920s and 1930s, many Congressmen chose to sever their affiliation with the Mahasabha. Some withdrew from the Mahasabha because they came to recognize that it was an impediment to Hindu-Muslim unity, others because they were pursuing the main chance. In 1936, shortly before he himself left the Mahasabha, Bihari Congress leader Jagat Narain Lal complained that many Congressmen who were "ardent workers in the Hindu cause" were "willing to surrender their Hindu feelings to the Congress for the purpose of going to the [Legislative] Councils."²¹

A third way of conceptualizing the transformation of the Mahasabha is from the standpoint of its program: its evolution from an organization promoting Hindu *sangathan* to the standard-bearer of Hindu nationalism or *Hindutva*.

The idea of Hindu *sangathan* (unity/solidarity/strength) has a complex lineage, one we can only hint at here. It drew upon the neo-Hindu identity that had developed in the late 19th century as the result of a confluence of factors, including religious revivalism and "integrative colonial communication, administrative and economic structures."²² *Sangathan* in so far as it connoted solidarity had a definite reformist ring to it, for it undercut traditional caste hierarchies and exclusivism. But the concept of Hindu *sangathan* was very much bound up with idea of communal strength in comparison to, and competition with, Muslims and other groups.

²¹ Jagat Narain Lal to M. Malaviya 29 June 1936, Malaviya Papers, NMML Microfilm.

²² Sumit Sarkar, "Indian Nationalism and the Politics of Hindutva," *Contesting the Nation: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy in India*, ed. David Ludden (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania) 273.

Here it is necessary to tie Hindu *sangathan* to two other notions prevalent in India in the first two decades of the 20th century and which resonated in the Hindu Mahasabha throughout its history—the notions of Hindu superiority and of an imminent threat to Hinduism (Hinduism in danger/the dying race.) The notion of “Hindu superiority” is readily understandable as a reaction against colonialist assertions of British, Christian, and White superiority. The second, apparently contrary notion, voices the deep current of anxiety that underlay the aggressive assertions of Hindu superiority.

That said, the idea that the Hindus were threatened with extinction—which was based on a 420-year extrapolation of the decline in the number of Hindus enumerated in the 1901 and 1911 censuses—is so preposterous as to demand further explication. Fears of the passing of traditional society and in particular the undermining of caste hierarchies no doubt explain the appeal that this notion had for some. But it is important to recognize that Arya Samajists who campaigned against caste barriers, like Swami Shradhannad, issued some of the shrillest warnings of Hindu extinction .

Below I shall discuss the growing importance that the British had given census figures and population ratios in their system of imperial control, thus making them a source of communal friction. But fears for the size and potency of the Hindu community must also be seen within a wider context in India and internationally of heightened class, racial, and national consciousness and rivalry rooted in the quickening pace of social change, the “new imperialism” of the late 19th century, and the spread of social darwinist ideology. Surely it is no coincidence that the first decade of the 20th Century saw a panic

amongst British politicians, academics and editorial writers over the “enfeeblement of the English race,” following a string of British defeats in the early stages of the Boer War.²³

The communal, competitive and political thrust of *sangathan* becomes clear when we consider how the Hindu Mahasabha came to define it in the 1920s. For the Mahasabahites, the measures of Hindu strength were entirely secular: the space accorded Hindus in the public sphere; the ability of male Hindus to defend themselves, their women and children; and last but not least the numerical-political strength of Hindus as measured by the *Raj*’s decennial census—especially in relation to the size of the Muslim population.

The concern over population ratios becomes comprehensible only when one understands that political power and public service employment had become tied to the census and to the British Indian administration’s census categories. The 1919 India Act introduced separate electorates for Sikhs and Christians—they had existed for Muslims since 1909—and enshrined the principle that the share of seats allotted a community in the Central Legislature and Provincial Councils was tied to its size as determined by the census, rather than its wealth and traditional political importance. As one historian has noted, “... under the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, for the first time, power began to be distributed, at least in some measure according to population. . . . Numbers began to matter.”²⁴

A second effect of the legislative reform of 1919 was to greatly increase the stakes in the struggle for council seats. Under a system called dyarchy, control over a number of provincial government departments—and, hence, the power to dispense government

²³ For an example of how the idea of the “enfeeblement” of the race echoed round the Empire and in sometimes surprising ways see Carol Bacchi, “Race Regeneration and Social Purity: A Study of the Social Attitudes of Canada’s English-Speaking Suffragists,” *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, 11 (1978): 460-474.

²⁴ David Page, *Prelude to Partition: The Indian Muslims and the Imperial System of Control, 1920-32* (Delhi: OUP, 1982) 40.

contracts and other forms of patronage—was ceded to Indian legislators. Politicians were quick to use their new power to reward their friends and to prove to their electors that they had the interests of their communal electorate at heart. Muslim politicians in the Punjab and Bengal used the provincial councils to wrest a larger share of government jobs and education grants for the Muslim middle class.²⁵

Boosting the numerical strength of the Hindu community was thus tied directly to the competition for jobs and contracts. And this competition grew fiercer in the 1920s, as the ranks of the educated swelled, while India's economy stagnated and the government, which had depleted India's resources to support the war effort, retrenched.

The Mahasabhites employed several means to maximize Hindu numerical-political strength. The definition of Hindu was broadened. Under a 1924 amendment to its constitution, the Mahasabha declared that all who professed a faith indigenous to India—whether they were hill tribesmen, orthodox Hindus, members of the Arya Samaj, Buddhists, Jains or Sikhs—were Hindus. The Mahasabha urged the government to interpret the results of the 1921 census in this vein and mounted a major campaign at the time of the 1931 census to press the government to employ its definition.

The Mahasabha also lent its support to the *shuddhi* proselytizing movement, which saw Arya Samajist and *sanatan* Hindus put aside their religious differences to seek to reclaim “fallen” Hindus. Whilst the Mahasabha did not itself carry out *shuddhi*, it was the principal advocate of *shuddhi* in Indian political debates, arguing that even if the *shuddhi* campaigns were contributing to the embittering of communal relations they were a necessary response to the Muslim *tanzim* and *tabligh* movements. That the

²⁵ Page, 44-46 and S.L. Malhotra, *Gandhi: An Experiment with Communal Politics. (A Study of Gandhi's Role in Punjab Politics, 1922-1931)* (Chandigarh: Panjab University Publication Bureau, 1975) 44-45.

Mahasabha's support for *shuddhi* was rooted in mercenary political considerations was admitted by M.R. Jayakar, Congress politician and head of the Bombay provincial Hindu Sabha, "Now that the Montagu-Chelmsford Report has put a value on each individual ... if a single Hindu be taken out of his religion owing to causes which have nothing to do with the religious change of mind—we resent that conversion."²⁶

A third front in the Mahasabha's struggle to maximize Hindu numerical-political strength was its work among the Untouchables or Depressed Classes.²⁷ Time and again, Hindu Mahasabha conferences heard warnings that if upper caste Hindus did not allow Untouchables to use village wells and worship in Hindu temples, the Untouchables would seek to get round these disabilities by joining other faiths. If Hindus did not remove the "blot" of untouchability, the Sind Congress leader Dr. Choithram told the 1926 Mahasabha session, "Muslim and Christian missionaries would take advantage of the weakness of their social system."²⁸ But the Mahasabha's enthusiasm for removing caste disabilities was tempered by the need to maintain the support of the much more economically and politically-powerful orthodox community. A jaded Lajpat Rai characterized the Mahasabha's efforts to remove caste disabilities as "rather half-hearted and ineffective."²⁹

²⁶ Jayakar Papers, File 437, Item 118.

²⁷ *Untouchables* is one of several terms coined in the twentieth century to denote all those belonging to groups traditionally deemed by caste Hindus to be so ritually impure as to be outside the four-*varna* system. Historically, the Untouchables were divided by region and *jati*, and the disabilities to which they were subjected varied widely. But with modern politics they came to be perceived and to perceive themselves as a discrete social and political grouping sharing a common condition and interests. In line with the usage that prevailed in the 1930s and 1940s, this thesis uses the terms Untouchables and Depressed Classes interchangeably. The derivations and connotations of the terms Untouchable, Depressed Classes, Scheduled Castes, *Harijan* and *Dalit* are discussed at length in O. Mendelsohn and M. Vicziany, *The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty and the State in Modern India* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998) 2-5, and the first chapter of Trilok Nath, *Politics of the Depressed Classes* (Delhi: Deputy Publications, 1987).

²⁸ *JAR*, II, 1926: 401.

²⁹ Lajpat Rai, *The Arya Samaj*, 270.

One further point needs to be made about the pre-1937 Hindu Mahasabha before we turn to a discussion of the nature of the change involved in the Mahasabha's adoption of *Hindutva*. The Mahasabha held that Hindu "tolerance" was proof of Hindu superiority. It also claimed to be non-communal, because its conference resolutions frequently called for the abolition of separate communal electorates and the scrapping of communal quotas for public service jobs. In reality, the pre-1937 Mahasabha, like the post-, was intolerant, aggressively communal, and anti-democratic. Only a small layer of better-off Muslims pressed for and benefited from the British-designed system of communal-political representation and job allocation, yet the Mahasabha held all Muslims to be collectively responsible. Not only did the Mahasabha routinely raise its own demands for the communal division of power and pelf, in the Muslim-majority provinces, where census numbers worked in favor of its adversaries, it called for the communal share of political power to be tied to wealth, communal tax receipts, and, in Bengal, community educational and cultural achievements. Because the Hindu middle class, for complex historical reasons, tended to be larger and wealthier, the Mahasabhites pressed for voter income and educational requirements to be uniform, but never for a universal franchise.

In the India of the 1920s and 1930s, Hindu *sangathan* had an implicit political thrust, especially in so far as strength was defined as numerical-political strength. *Hindutva* by contrast was an explicitly political doctrine, which defined who belonged to the nation and who didn't. As we shall detail in Chapter 2, the notion of "Hindu superiority" was now translated into a political program: Hindus should have an exalted position within India.

Previously, the Mahasabha had held that "Hindu interests" were distinct from national or Indian interests and claimed to be merely pleading for Hindu communal interests not to be sacrificed in pursuit of Hindu-Muslim unity. Now the Mahasabha asserted that a Hindu national identity had to be made the basis of all politics.

From the local details of the music and the mosque right up to the question of Indian Federation ... we should openly and separately take up a stand as Hindus and support, oppose or take every step in the interests of Hindudom alone. Our politics henceforth will be purely Hindu politics fashioned and tested in Hindu terms only, in such wise as will help the consolidation, freedom and life-growth of our Hindu nation.³⁰

Whereas Hindu *sangathan* did not reject the possibility of harmonious relations between Hindus and other religious groups and a broader Indian national identity, Savarkar and the Hindu nationalists condemned the Congress' liberal-territorial nationalism as its "original sin." Conflict between Hindus and Muslims was inevitable, for the Muslims were an alien, "anti-national minority." Indeed, the key struggle to ensure the ascendancy of the Hindu nation was not with the British colonial regime, but the Muslims. The Muslims were the "Enemy People" of the Hindu nation.³¹

On an ideological plane the Mahasabha's crystallization into a Hindu nationalist party was the outcome of a three-cornered process of ideological differentiation, involving it, the Congress and the Muslim League. Some pioneer Indian nationalists, generally the more socially conservative, had conceived of an India comprised of "discrete communities each with its own priorities and interests and each with the right to determine its own (social) future."³² This conception, however, gave rise to a question:

³⁰ V.D. Savarkar, *Hindu Rashtra Darshan*, Third Edition [Hereafter *Hindu Rashtra*], (Bombay: Veer Savarkar Prakashan, 1992) 54.

³¹ V.D. Savarkar, *Hindu Rashtra*, 52 and 84; Anant Sadashiv (Guruji) Bhide, *From Quit India to Split India* (Poona: Manohar Mahadeo Kelkar, 1945) 94-95.

³² Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi: OUP, 1992) 210

was the notion that India was comprised of Hindu + Muslim + Christian + Parsi, etc. communities descriptive or prescriptive? Was the Indian nation comprised of the adherents of several faiths or was it a federation of religiously-defined corporate groups? Although from radically different perspectives, the Congress, the League and the Hindu Mahasabha all came to reject this early nationalist vision during the 1930s. Declared Gandhi, "While we may staunchly adhere to our respective faiths, we must be in the Congress Indians first and Indian last."³³ Meanwhile, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League moved along parallel lines to declare that South Asia's Muslims were separate from and alien to the Indian/Hindu nation.

From a political standpoint, the Hindu Mahasabha's crystallization into a Hindu nationalist party was rooted in a programmatic and pragmatic search for an alternative to the Congress and Congress nationalism. The elements that gravitated to the Mahasabha felt that the Congress was not vigorously asserting Hindu interests in the communal power struggle. But they were also troubled by the growth of leftist sentiment in and around the Congress. With the election of the "communist" Jawaharlal Nehru to the Congress presidency, affirmed Moonje in the Nagpur Hindu Sabha's 1937 election manifesto, the differences between the Mahasabha and the Congress were becoming "fundamental and unadjustable."³⁴

* * *

This dissertation concentrates on the post-1937 history of the Mahasabha, specifically 1938-1952, its first fifteen years as a political party. There are several reasons

and 231; Sumit Sarkar, "Indian Nationalism and the Politics of Hindutva," 273; Tapun Basu et al, *Khaki Shorts*, 6-7.

³³ M.K. Gandhi, *CWG*, V. XLII, 379. As cited in Antony Thomas, *Mahatma Gandhi and the Communal Problem: From the Khilifat Movement to Quit India* (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1983), 19.

³⁴ "Nagpur Hindu Sabha's Election Manifesto," Jayakar Papers, File 65.

for my having chosen this periodic focus. My Master's dissertation, "From 'Hindu-Muslim Unity' to 'Hindu Raj': The Evolution of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha, 1922-1939," concentrated on the Mahasabha's transformation into a self-conscious political organization. The Mahasabha's evolution does not readily conform to the standard periodization of twentieth century Indian history. By pushing my study to 1952, I want to show the importance of transgressing the 1947 Independence/Partition divide, at least for the study of some political and social phenomena. Last but not least, the 1937-52 period includes those years when the Mahasabha's influence was greatest and the most directly discernible

Whilst my focus is on the Mahasabha's development after 1937, Chapter 2 does include a discussion of the years immediately preceding Savarkar's presidency. There are several reasons for beginning with the internal crisis that convulsed the Mahasabha in the mid-1930s and which was accentuated by the 1937 elections. The impulses under which the Mahasabha completed its metamorphosis into a political party reveal much about its nature; the Mahasabha's pre-history as an ostensibly non-political organization left a legacy; discussion of the 1937 elections points to important similarities in the development of the Mahasabha and the Muslim League.

II: Communalism and Communal Political Identities

Beginning with the very first page of this dissertation, I have employed the term communalism. I do so advisedly, recognizing that it implies a definite attitude toward Partition and to a host of historiographic and political controversies extending from India's medieval past to today. The Governments of Pakistan and Bangladesh and historians of the Pakistani "national school," such as K.K. Aziz, reject the term entirely.

They regard the Muslim communalist politicians—those who argued that India's Moslems should act politically only through Muslim organizations and should be represented in political institutions exclusively by their co-religionists—as “Muslim nationalists.” In their view the establishment of Pakistan was the inevitable outcome of a primordial religious-cultural Muslim identity; Hindu-Muslim conflict was “embedded in the ‘historical logic’ ” of Indian history.³⁵

The term communalism has also been attacked from the standpoint that the colonial authorities, because of orientalist beliefs that India was characterized by special religious fervor and irrationality and their own wilful blindness as to the injustice of the colonial regime, affixed the label “communal riot” to diverse phenomena, including protests over socio-economic grievances and against police violence.³⁶ This is a valid point that underlines the need for scholars to interrogate official claims.

But communalism should not be reduced to the associated phenomenon of communal violence. Regardless of the causes of specific riots, the violence that convulsed India between 1922 and 1926 formed the backdrop to an increasingly bitter struggle amongst India's indigenous political class over communal prerogatives, census numbers, and the communal division of seats and jobs. And like the British claims, indigenous interpretations of specific acts of violence as arising from an all-India conflict between discrete and nationally-uniform religious communities cannot be attributed solely to malicious instrumental intent. Communalism is a cognitive frame.

³⁵ As cited from Mushirul Hasan, who holds the contrary view, *India's Partition: Process, Strategy and Mobilization*, Mushirul Hasan, ed. (Delhi: OUP, 1993) 1. See also *Inventing Boundaries: Gender, Politics and the Partition Of India*, Mushirul Hasan, ed. (New Delhi: OUP, 2000)

³⁶ Gyanendra Pandey, *Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*.

Replacing “communalism” with such terms as “sectarian” (which carries the connotation of religious disputation), “majoritarian” or “communitarian” in the hope of escaping colonialist constructions of knowledge is a vain pursuit. It adds nothing to our understanding of the phenomenon in question, while creating terminological confusion.

As is the case with many social science concepts, there is no accepted definition of communalism. Most definitions, however, stress that while communal identities are based on religion they are in fact almost entirely devoid of religious content and have their root in, or at least have been reinforced by, state action.

One of the reasons communalism is difficult to define is also in part why the concept is useful. It denotes not a single belief but a continuum of beliefs, ranging from the assertion that there is a South Asian Hindu or Muslim community that has significant secular interests in common to the claim that they comprise separate nations. Some scholars, in reaction to the aforementioned critique of the term communalism, have taken to calling any variant of nationalism that emphasizes India’s Hindu heritage as Hindu nationalism and any politician like Madan Mohan Malaviya or Lajpat Rai who advocated Hindu *sangathan* as a Hindu nationalist.³⁷ I dissent from this practice. To my mind, Hindu nationalism should be reserved for those who held that India should be a Hindu *Raj*. At the same time, recognition that Hindu nationalism is a subset of Hindu communalism—its most extreme variant—alerts us to the fact that many who began as Hindu *sangathanists*, or otherwise became immersed in the struggle for “Hindu rights,” subsequently became Hindu nationalists. Indeed, so strongly does the experience of late colonial India suggest that communalism has an inherent tendency to become more

³⁷ See for example, William Gould, “Congress Radicals and Hindu Militancy: Sampurnanand and Purushottam Das Tandon in the Politics of the United Provinces, 1930-1947,” *MAS*, 36 (2002) 619-655.

radical, one scholar has compared it to "a habit-forming drug which, so long as it is administered is needed in ever-increasing doses."³⁸

Why communalist politics came to play such an important role in British India, why a subcontinent peopled by more than a dozen major ethno-linguistic groups and hundreds of smaller groupings and riven by caste and class divisions came to be politically polarized along Hindu-Muslim lines, remains a matter of great controversy. Indeed, it is safe to say that communalism and its offspring, the Partition of 1947, are the most contentious and vexatious questions in the historiography of modern India.

Although this debate is beyond the purview of this thesis, a few brief observations are in order.

Central to this study is the understanding that communal identities are modern political constructs that emerged in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth, coincident with the development in British India of representative institutions and the spread of notions of popular sovereignty. Communal identities did not arise due to religious doctrinal differences, nor naturally out of medieval values. In traditional Indian society, people identified themselves not as Hindus or Muslims, but according to *jati* and social class.³⁹ Nor was either religious current generally conceived as constituting a whole, radically distinct from, and opposed to, the other current. Both Hindus and Muslims were divided into numerous sects. Participation by the adherents of one faith in the religious festivals of the other was common.⁴⁰

³⁸ W.C. Smith, *Modern Islam in India*, 1946 ed. (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1963) 172.

³⁹ A.T. Embree, *India's Search for National Identity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972) 18.

⁴⁰ Mushirul Hasan, *Nationalism and Communal Politics in India* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1991) 1-13; Francis Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims. The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims, 1860-1923* (London: CUP, 1974) Chapter 1; Paul Brass, "Elite Groups, Symbol Manipulation, and Ethnic Identity Among the Muslims of South Asia," *Political Identity in South Asia*, eds. David Taylor and Malcolm Yapp (London: Curzon Press, 1979) 53.

Many historians have pointed to the role the British colonial authorities played in constructing communal political identities.

The British authorities materially assisted this process ... by treating the Muslims of India as an official category for purposes of census, enumeration, distribution of government appointments, political representation and education.⁴¹

The British insisted on discussing Indian society and politics in terms of Muslims and Hindus. ...

This is one of the most important facts of British Indian history; it was a potent force in encouraging the growth of political groups or parties on the basis of religious community. For, if the government wished, to woo "the Muslims," "Muslims", whether true believers or not, would assuredly step forward to take whatever was going.⁴²

Whether first formulated as part of a deliberate policy of "divide and rule" or, as is more likely, as the result of the efforts of the colonial authorities to impose conceptual order on an unfamiliar and complex Indian reality, communal categories and similarly constructed concepts of caste (eg. "the martial races") were rapidly incorporated into the system of imperial control.⁴³ The British *Raj*, as the historians cited above observed, created communal political interests, then used them to woo support and sow discord among a native political elite comprised of remnants of India's traditional gentry and newly empowered merchant-banker and professional classes. The British Indian government also invoked communal and caste categories to justify policies that were in fact designed to placate class interests. The Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1900 was designed to bolster the position of the province's landlords *vis a vis* the moneylenders and traders. But it did so not by placing restrictions on the powers of capital, but by barring certain castes of Hindus,

⁴¹ Brass, *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴² F. Robinson, 99-100. See also, Gayendra Pandey, *Construction of Communalism*, particularly Chapter 2; G.R. Thursby, *Hindu-Muslim Relations*, 174-175; and Sandria Freitag, *Collective Action and Community. Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) 61.

⁴³ Gayendra Pandey discusses how diffuse caste identities were recast by colonial authorities into rigid socio-economic categories in *Construction of Communalism*, 67-69.

those from which most of the province's money-lenders and traders came, from owning and repossessing land. Separate communal electorates were a major factor in the communalization of politics, for candidates for political office were no longer compelled to seek support from electors who belonged to India's other major faith. Their introduction under the 1909 Indian Councils Act, however, had a quite specific purpose: to bolster the position of the Muslim landlords whose political authority had come under increasing challenge from a growing class of Muslim professionals.⁴⁴

The promotion of communal interests and manipulation of communal tensions were far from the only means employed by the British to maintain imperial rule. Moreover, it was only a means, not the goal of British rule. Concerned as they were first and foremost with the maintenance of public order, the colonial authorities were aghast when the tensions generated by communal political conflict began, in the 1920s, to be vented in riots. Still the policy of "Divide and Rule" was not, as some historians have suggested, a fiction invented by nationalist politicians.⁴⁵ Wrote Lord Birkenhead, the Secretary of State for India, to Viceroy Reading, "I have always placed my highest and most permanent hopes in the eternity of the communal situation."⁴⁶ Churchill, according to the minutes of a 1940 cabinet meeting, "regarded the Hindu-Muslim feud as the bulwark of British rule in India."⁴⁷

If the British could divide Indians, it was only because there were numerous socio-economic faultlines underlying Indian society. Another conclusion emerging from recent historical writing is that the rise of communalism was fuelled by the attempt of various social groups to use religion and religious identities as a means of validating their social

⁴⁴ David Page, 13-14.

⁴⁵ See for example, Francis Robinson, 2 and 348-349; Thursby, 173-175.

⁴⁶ As cited by Thursby, 173.

⁴⁷ As cited by Bipan Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India*, 2nd Edition Revised (New Delhi: Vikas, 1987), 245.

status and safeguarding their power. The landed gentry clutched at religion as a means of asserting its traditional right to political leadership under conditions in which its wealth and social position were increasingly being undermined by the economic and cultural upheaval that had resulted from India's subjugation to an alien, capitalist power. The cow-protection movement that erupted in the United Provinces (UP) and Bihar in the 1890s derived significant support from a layer of newly prosperous peasants who saw it as a means of laying claim to a higher social status.⁴⁸ In the dispute over whether Hindi in Devnagari script should be adopted alongside Urdu as the court language of the UP, the proponents of Hindi sought to mobilize support by tying it to an emerging neo-Hindu identity, while their Muslim opponents stressed Urdu's ties to the Middle East and Islam.⁴⁹

Rejection of the claim that India was necessarily or inevitably polarized along communal lines does not mean one must endorse claims that India had a syncretic culture in which religious differences did not matter. A syncretic culture could only be very limited in a society so marked by social inequality and in which class divisions were reinforced and supplemented by the barriers of caste.

Many scholars have pointed to the overlap between communal and class divisions in the two principal Muslim majority provinces, the Punjab and Bengal, arguing persuasively that this was an essential condition for the development of mass support for the Muslim League's Pakistan Demand. In north-west India, the commercial elite was predominantly drawn from Hindu groups. The hardships to which the peasantry were subjected by the development of commercial agriculture could thus easily be portrayed as

⁴⁸ Freitag, 166; Gyanendra Pandey, *Construction of Communalism*, 93-94.

⁴⁹ See Francis Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims* and Christopher King, *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India* (Oxford: OUP, 1994).

the product of urban Hindu/*bania* oppression.⁵⁰ In east Bengal, the peasantry was largely Muslim while most of the *zamindars* were Hindu.

“Indian” was also a constructed political identity.⁵¹ Indeed, the first response of the British *Raj* to the rise of Indian nationalism was to deny that there were any Indians.⁵² What distinguished Indian nationalism from Muslim and Hindu communalism was political program. Notwithstanding the limitations, prejudices and selfish class interests of the Congress leadership, the vision of a democratic, secular and united India was, within the context of colonial India, a liberating one that served to undermine caste and religious barriers. It can be argued that the Indian National Congress ultimately betrayed this vision, preferring to unite India from above, by inheriting the state constructed by the *Raj*, to leading a popular movement from below. What is undeniable is that in the final years of British rule both the Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha became refuges for privileged and conservative elements within Indian society who feared the democratic and egalitarian thrust of the struggle against British rule. Partition far from solving the problem of the co-existence of Hindus and Muslims in South Asia has only exacerbated communal tensions and animosities. Today the conflict between a professedly Islamic Pakistan and an India that has increasingly turned away from the secular promise of its constitution threatens the subcontinent with nuclear conflagration.

⁵⁰ Denunciations of the Hindu *banias* of Lahore were by no means restricted to Muslim landlords and politicians. The Jat Hindu leader and Unionist politician Chhottu Ram made *banias* the butt of numerous speeches. See Nonica Datta, *Forming an Identity: A Social History of the Jats* (New Delhi: OUP, 1999) Chapters 5 and 6.

⁵¹ Eric Hobsbawm's *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990) is a good summation of the argument against the ethno-linguistic school of nationalism and nation-state formation.

⁵² Embree, 1.

The Hindu Mahasabha and Hinduism:

In the foregoing discussion I have insisted that communalism while based on a state-defined taxonomy of religious allegiance has little to do with religion. Savarkar, the principle ideologue of Hindu nationalism, was an avowed atheist.⁵³ Neither the Mahasabha nor the Muslim League wanted to establish a theocracy, i.e. a state governed by the clergy or the religiously righteous. The principal leaders of the Mahasabha and the League, like those of the Congress, came from the western-educated middle class. Since its founding in 1964, the RSS-affiliated Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) has had considerable success in organizing *sadhus* in support of Hindu nationalism. But the Mahasabha had little priestly support, at least prior to the communal eruption of 1946-47.

Nonetheless, it would be tendentious to claim that the Hindu Mahasabha and its popular appeal had nothing to do with religion. Whilst Savarkar may have mused in his *Essentials of Hindutva* about doing away with the term Hinduism—he saw disputes over how to define Hinduism as undermining his project to foster a Hindu national identity—the Mahasabha did not seek to rally support with the slogan “*Hindutva* in danger!”⁵⁴

Even when a Hindu nationalist party, the Mahasabha took a special interest in upholding Hindu religious rights against the Muslims and other groups, seeing such disputes as an opportunity to give credence to its claim that the Mahasabha was the party concerned with the fate of the Hindus. Similarly, with a view to promoting Hindu solidarity, the Mahasabha encouraged participation in Hindu religious rites and festivals.

Beyond these deliberate efforts to inculcate a Hindu national consciousness, it is safe to say that the Hindu Mahasabha leadership—partly deliberately and partly

⁵³ Dhananjay Keer, *Veer Savarkar* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1966) 201.

⁵⁴ V.D. Savarkar, “Essentials of Hindutva,” *Savarkar Writings*, 69.

unconsciously —played on and sought to exploit the ambivalence between Hinduism as a religious current and Hindu nationalism. Savarkar held *shuddhi* to be “in the main a political and national necessity.” Hindus, he wrote in 1938, must recognize that political power “hinges more and more on the census, the population strength of the community. And the population strength of the Hindus, other things being equal, must depend in the main on the *Shuddhi* movement.”⁵⁵ But those who actually performed the *shuddhi* rites and the tribal or depressed class persons they “reclaimed” for Hinduism likely interpreted the experience differently.

While religiosity did not give rise to communalism, a religiously-grounded allegiance to the Hindus as a group likely made one more susceptible to communal appeals under conditions of mounting missionary and communal-political competition. Some people, however, progressed in the other direction. Commitment to Hindu nationalism reinforced their religious affinity for Hinduism. The ambiguities and ambivalences in the Mahasabha’s relationship to religion are well-illustrated in the persons of Gandhi’s assassins. Gandhi’s murderer Nathuram Godse was by all accounts devout. His principal accomplice, Narayan Apte, was something of a bon vivant.⁵⁶

III: More on the Aims and Parameters of this Study

In so far as this thesis succeeds in historicizing the Hindu Mahasabha it will perforce contribute to our understanding of the respective roles that the Indian National Congress and the colonial state played in the making of modern South Asia.

Mention has already been made of the complexity of the Mahasabha-Congress relationship. This thesis will show that the dominant wing of the post-1937 Mahasabha

⁵⁵ V.D. Savarkar, “Introduction,” to Indra Prakash, *History of the Hindu Mahasabha*, 1938 ed., xi and xii.

⁵⁶ Manohar Malgonkar, *The Men Who Killed Gandhi*, (London: MacMillan, 1978).

was virulently opposed to the Congress and that its hostility—especially toward M.K. Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru—increased during the 1940s. Only under extreme duress did the Mahasabha reconcile itself to the liberal-democratic political order India fashioned between 1945 and 1952. Yet important elements within both the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha repeatedly pressed for the two organizations to ally. Moreover, to the extent that the Mahasabha succeeded in broadening its support, it inevitably came under pressure to join forces with the predominantly Hindu-backed Congress in pressing for independence and opposing the Muslim League.

Many scholars have argued that a crucial condition for the Muslim League's rapid expansion during World War Two was the favorable attitude of the colonial authorities. By promoting the League as a counterweight to the anti-war Congress, the British lent the Muslim League stature and gave credibility to its Pakistan Demand, thus deepening the communal divide and helping pave the way for Partition. Another side of this process—one almost entirely neglected by historians—is the colonial regime's war-time patronage of the Hindu Mahasabha. Because the Mahasabha was pro-war, staunchly anti-Congress, and eager to serve in the *Raj*'s political institutions, the British did much to promote it. This dissertation will trace the Mahasabha's World War II cooperation with the *Raj* and show that on the Mahasabha's part this was not, in a fundamental sense, a response to war-time exigencies but rather flowed from the objectives and outlook of Hindu nationalism.

In the main, this is a work of political history. Neither the Mahasabha's organizational growth nor the social service activities undertaken by local Hindu Sabha branches are discussed in detail.

Due to a lack of reliable data, I have not attempted a quantitative study of the Mahasabha's social composition, be it from the standpoint of class, occupation, or caste. Nonetheless, a sociological portrait of the Mahasabha does emerge from my analysis of its program and actions—including the Mahasabha's pursuit of an "Anglo-Hindu alliance," opposition to mass agitation against the *Raj*, promotion of communal violence and advocacy of the expulsion of Muslims from India *en masse* in 1947-48 and 1950. Not only was the Mahasabha largely indifferent to the plight of India's toiling masses; Chapter 2 will demonstrate its emergence was very much a reaction against *mazdoor-kisan* (worker-peasant) assertion and the growth of left-wing sentiment inside the Congress. The Mahasabha's demands for Hindus to receive a greater share of public service jobs, whether by abolishing communal quotas or increasing the share reserved for Hindus, voiced the concerns and resentments of a narrow stratum of matriculated, urban Hindus. Its "buy Hindu" agitations benefited a more disparate grouping, running the gamut from wealthy traders through small shopkeepers and hawkers. The Mahasabha, especially in the United Provinces, was in the vanguard of opposition to the abolition of the semi-feudal *zamindari* system of land ownership, and vigorously upheld the autonomy and prerogatives of the *Raj*'s Princely States.

This thesis is painted on a broad canvass. The fifteen years that form the periodic focus of this study were, without fear of contradiction, the most tumultuous in the twentieth-century history of the subcontinent. In contrast to most recent historical writing on modern South Asia, I have adopted an all-India, rather than a regional or local, perspective. Scholars with more extensive knowledge of specific regions and localities may well perceive interconnections and influences that escaped this author. But if

distance renders some things indiscernible, there are also advantages in charting the Mahasabha's history from Himalayan heights, for it was at the level of all-India politics and as the advocate of a third vision of the Indian polity that the Mahasabha had its greatest impact.

That said, we must not lose sight of the fact that the Mahasabha was not a very cohesive organization. There are several reasons for this. The Hindu Mahasabha did not begin its life as a political party. Its leadership had few powers of patronage and certainly nothing like those the Congress exercised when it held office in a majority of India's provinces from 1937 to 1939. Last but not least, the post-1937 Mahasabha was very much an agglomeration of regionally-rooted anti-Congress groupings and these had disparate class and communal concerns. Given India's size, ethno-linguistic diversity and social complexity, any all-India organization had to be something of an amalgam. The Mahasabha, however, was so regionally disparate—its various provincial branches fitting quite differently into the local political landscape—that one scholar has doubted the feasibility of writing its history.⁵⁷

The strength of provincialism within the Hindu Mahasabha raises the question of the relationship of its Hindu nationalist ideology to various regional identities. Certainly, the Hindu nationalism expounded by the Poona adherents of the Hindu Mahasabha bore the imprint of Maratha or Maharashtran consciousness. It gave prominence to the 17th Maratha warrior-king Shivaji, casting him as a Hindu nationalist hero, and laid special emphasis on Hindus' martial tradition. By contrast, the Bengal Mahasabhites helped fashion and popularize a Bengali Hindu identity that stressed Hindus' intellectual accomplishments. This identity underpinned the Bengal *bhadralok*'s claim that to force

⁵⁷ See Joseph Alter, "Somatic Nationalism: Indian Wrestling and Militant Hinduism," *MAS* 28 (1994).

them to live under a political system that gave the culturally inferior Muslim population a larger share of legislative power was intolerable and an affront to modern civilization.

This thesis will argue that the fortunes and ultimate failure of the Mahasabha were closely connected with the travails of various privileged and elite social strata. Initially beneficiaries of British rule, these groups, albeit not always at the same pace or to the same extent, lost a significant measure of their political power with the extension of the franchise beyond a mere fraction of the population, the emergence of powerful labor, *kisan* and lower caste movements, Congress' long rise to power, and the eventual dismantling of the *Raj* and partitioning of the subcontinent.

To properly trace the Mahsabaha's evolution, this study will occasionally be compelled to leave the all-India arena and focus on the actions, concerns and composition of the more important of its provincial components. I have, however, spared the reader the South Asianist's equivalent of the Viceroy's tour; that is, periodic interruptions of the narrative for updates on the work of the various provincial Hindu Sabhas.

A few observations about the regional make-up of the Hindu Mahasabha are nonetheless necessary. Like contemporary Hindu nationalism, the Hindu Mahasabha was predominantly a north and west Indian movement. Regional responsibility for both the Mahasabha's birth and early 1920s revival lies with the United Provinces and the Punjab. Over time, however, the Mahasabha's centre of gravity shifted and in the post-1937 period, the Mahasabha was strongest in Maharashtra and Bengal. Also, beginning in the 1930s, the Mahasabha spread beyond the provinces of British India and developed a following in many of the princely states of central and western India. The Maratha ruler of Gwalior was one of a number of princes who encouraged the implantation of the

Mahasabha in his state, believing it could prove useful in countering the emerging states' people's movement.

The Mahasabha's amorphous character paradoxically resulted in its presidents having great influence in formulating its policy at the national level. This thesis devotes much attention to tracing the actions of Savarkar and his immediate successor as Mahasabha President and Working President, Shyama Prasad Mookerjee. Fleshing out Savarkar's and Mookerjee's political biographies is of importance since their legacies remain a contentious issue in contemporary India. We have already commented on Savarkar's role in formulating the basic tenets of *Hindutva*. Mookerjee is celebrated by the BJP for his role in spearheading the formation of its predecessor, the Jana Sangh.

Whilst this dissertation covers much ground, some important issues receive no or only cursory treatment. When I began this study, I intended to include an extensive discussion of the Hindu Mahasabha's relationship with the RSS. Due to limitations of time and space this has not proven possible, but I have done enough preliminary spade work to arrive at one important conclusion. Because the Mahasabha has been so little studied and because scholars have largely depended upon RSS informants to evaluate the relationship between the two organizations, the RSS's early ideological and organizational dependence on the Mahasabha has been grossly underestimated. Andersen and Damle, whose own work is not entirely free from this fault, nonetheless do note that Mahasabha support was pivotal in the pre-1940 development of the RSS:

Prominent members of local Hindu Sabhas would introduce RSS organizers to potential recruits and donors, provide organizers and housing and the RSS with a meeting area. This led many members of the Mahasabha, including Dr. Moonje, to conclude that the RSS would function as the youth wing of the Mahasabha. Events were to prove them wrong.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Andersen and Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu*

A second area that I believe is vital in situating the Hindu Mahasabha, but which receives only limited treatment in my dissertation is the Mahasabha's attitude toward the Untouchables and its interaction with Depressed Class politicians and movements. The rise of communalism and the fate of the Depressed Classes have traditionally been viewed as unrelated. Thus a valuable study like Mushirul Hassan's *Nationalism and Communal Politics in Modern India, 1885-1930* fails to make any mention of the Depressed Classes. Yet the issue of where the Untouchables would figure in the new India cast a long shadow over the debates between Hindu and Muslim political leaders. The October 1906 memorandum that is generally considered to have been the founding document of the Muslim League argued that if one discounted the tribals and "those classes who are ordinarily classified as Hindus but properly speaking are not Hindus at all" (i.e. the Depressed Classes), the gap in size between India's Hindu and Muslims communities largely disappeared.⁵⁹ The Depressed Classes are of particular pertinence to the Congress-Mahasabha relationship, for on this issue the overlap in their assumptions and objectives was especially large. Although the topic of the Mahasabha and the Depressed Classes is broached only rarely in the pages that follow, I have tackled this subject in a published article.⁶⁰

Women figured prominently in Mahasabha rhetoric—as victims of Muslim violence and possible defectors to Islam. Unfortunately, my dissertation's focus on political interaction has not allowed me to pursue this issue, nor explore the Mahasabha's

Revivalism (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1987) 39-40.

⁵⁹ "Address presented to Lord Minto, Viceroy of India, on October 1, 1906 at Simla, by a 35-man Muslim deputation headed by Sir Sultan Aga Khan, GCIE," Appendix B, in Ram Gopal, *Indian Muslims: A Political History (1858-1947)* (Bombay: Asia Publishing, 1959) 330.

⁶⁰ Keith Meadowcroft, "Trading in religio-political identities?: The 1936 Moonje-Ambedkar Pact," in *South Asia Between Turmoil and Hope*, eds. Hugh Johnston *et al.* (Calgary: South Asia Council of Canadian Asian Studies Association and Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute, 2000): 95-130.

attempt to form a parallel women's organization, the Hindu Mahila Sabha. There is, however, a growing body of scholarly literature that discusses the attitude of Hindu nationalists towards gender roles, patriarchy and women's rights.⁶¹

This thesis is comprised of nine chapters divided into three unequal parts. Part One situates our study of the Mahasabha, then traces its emergence and crystallization as a communal political party in the late 1930s. Part Two covers the period from September 1939 through Savarkar's December 1944 retirement as Mahasabha President. There are several reasons that this dissertation gives special importance to documenting the Mahasabha's role during World War II. The Mahasabha was never more politically powerful and probably never enjoyed greater popular support than in the early years of World War II. The close relations that it established with the *Raj* during this period tells us much about the Mahasabha and its orientation. Part Two also explores the divisions that emerged within the Mahasabha in the wake of the August 1942 Quit India rebellion over a host of issues, including negotiations with the Muslim League, Gandhi's 1943 fast, and Savarkar's attempts to get the Mahasabha into government.

Part Three traces the repeated and rapid changes in the Mahasabha's fortunes over a seven year-period from S.P. Mookerjee's assumption of the Mahasabha presidency through independent India's first national and provincial elections in 1951-52. Chapter 6 analyzes the failure of Mookerjee's attempt to recast the Mahasabha as a Hindu "people's party" allied with the Congress. The subsequent two chapters show that within the context of the 1946-47 debate over Pakistan and Partition, the Mahasabha became still more communally radical, emerging in 1947-48 and, after a period of inactivity due to

⁶¹ See for example, Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Butalia, eds., *Women and the Hindu Right: A Collection of Essays* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1995) and Tapan Basu et al, *Khaki Shorts, Saffron Flags: A Critique of the Hindu Right*.

government sanctions, again in 1950 as the ideologue of anti-Muslim violence and ethnic cleansing. Part Three also documents the Mahasabha's involvement in landlord and princely opposition to India's new democratic-capitalist order. Whilst a pivotal theme of Part Two is the Mahasabha-*Raj* relationship, a key theme of Part Three is the complex interaction between the Mahasabha and Congress—for despite its communal extremism and socio-economic conservatism, the Mahasabha was a sometime ally, or at least prospective ally, of the Congress during much of this period. Part Three disentangles the Mahasabha-Congress relationship, showing the ties between the two parties, the limits of these connections, and the sharp antagonism between the two parties' dominant factions. The Ninth and concluding chapter makes some summary remarks about the Mahasabha's evolution, including why it failed to gain a mass following.

Chapter 2: V.D. Savarkar and the transformation of the Hindu Mahasabha into a Hindu nationalist political party, 1937-39

In December 1937 Vinayak Damodar Savarkar assumed the presidency of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha—a position he would continue to hold, despite ill health and growing internal opposition, till the end of 1944. During his seven-year presidency, Savarkar placed an indelible stamp on the Mahasabha, spearheading its transformation into a political party that challenged the Indian National Congress for the support of India's Hindus. According to a pamphlet the Congress issued in 1948, Savarkar found the Mahasabha “an impotent body, without a clear-cut programme and without any mass support”; yet under his leadership it soon emerged as the exponent of “a virile programme for regimentation of the Hindu community” that “influenced large masses of Hindus.”¹ Honored by his followers with the title *Veer* (strong/brave/heroic), Savarkar was by all accounts a dynamic figure. A nationalist-terrorist in his youth, Savarkar was also an intellectual. By the age of twenty-six he had translated the autobiography of Giuseppe Mazzini into Marathi and written a highly romantic and influential account of the Indian Mutiny, *The First War of Indian Independence*.² To the Mahasabha, Savarkar brought a new sense of purpose. His *Hindutva* doctrine provided it with a coherent, if noxious, Hindu supremacist platform with which to oppose the Congress, Muslim League and India's incipient socialist movement. That said, changes in India's political dynamics must be our principal focus if we are to explain Savarkar's success in moulding the Mahasabha into a vibrant political force. Savarkar's predecessor as Mahasabha President, Bhai Parmanand, was no less an ardent advocate of Hindu nationalism and opponent of

¹ N.V. Rajkumar, *Indian Political Parties* (New Delhi: All-India Congress Committee, 1948) 115.

² For a brief summary of Savarkar's career as a nationalist-terrorist see Chetan Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths* (Oxford: Berg, 2001) 79-84.

Congress “appeasement” of the Muslims, yet his attempts to transform the Mahasabha into a rival to the Congress had foundered for want of support.

The Congress’ stunning victory in the 1937 provincial elections, the approach of war in Europe, and the concurrent intensification of communal and class conflict caused diverse elements in India’s middle and upper classes to reassess their political options. Savarkar’s drive to make the Mahasabha the protagonist of a Hindu communal definition of the Indian polity intersected with the search by sections of the landlord, big business, and Hindu professional and trader classes for a “populist” programme to withstand the multiple threats that they perceived in the coming to power of Congress provincial ministries, growing Muslim communal-political assertion, and worker-peasant and Depressed Classes politicization and unrest. The British, as we shall see later when we consider the war years, also provided the Mahasabha with an important hand-up.

This chapter will begin with a discussion of the internal crisis that convulsed the Mahasabha in the 1930s and culminated in the exit of Madan Mohan Malaviya and the Mahasabha’s pro-Congress wing. It will then consider the impact that the 1937 elections had on the Mahasabha and demonstrate that the Mahasabha’s communal radicalization paralleled the evolution of the Muslim League. Next Savarkar’s efforts to transform the Mahasabha into a right-wing rival to the Congress and the significance of his *Hindutva* doctrine will be discussed. After outlining the Mahasabha’s effort to woo the landlords and princes, the chapter will conclude by showing that many in the Mahasabha leadership, including Savarkar, Parmanand and Moonje, were strongly influenced by and felt great affinity for European fascism.

I: The Crisis in the Mahasabha in the middle 1930s

The Hindu Mahasabha of the middle 1930s was fraught with contradictions. An ostensibly non-political body, it had increasingly made its voice heard in political debates. Yet the Mahasabhites were deeply divided over their stand on major political questions. Mahasabha Working President Bhai Parmanand had denounced the Congress as a “revolutionary body” and mused that India’s Hindus might reconcile themselves to British rule if only the *Raj* would recognize their supremacy over the Muslims. “I feel an impulse in me,” Parmanand told the Mahasabha’s 1933 Ajmer session, “that the Hindus would willingly cooperate with Great Britain if their status and responsible position as the premier community in India is recognized in the political institutions of new India.”³ Other Mahasabhites, albeit a declining number, considered themselves loyal Congressmen. That the Mahasabha’s leaders were pulling in different directions was well-recognized. In an April 1934 letter M.R. Jayakar, an influential ex-Congressman and the former President of the Bombay Provincial Hindu Sabha, complained that “the 4 or 5 principal leaders of the Hindu Sabha speak with different voices ...”⁴ Meanwhile, pressure from an emerging Depressed Classes elite for representation in the *Raj*’s institutions further exacerbated tensions between the orthodox and those Mahasabhites who wanted caste barriers weakened, the better to repel the Muslim menace. If some Mahasabhites participated whole-heartedly in Gandhi’s anti-untouchability campaign, others feared riling the orthodox. A major bone of contention was temple-entry legislation. Exclaimed

³ *JAR*, II, 1933: 204-206.

⁴ M.R. Jayakar to Jagatnarain Lal, Jayakar Papers, File 207.

a frustrated Jayakar, "You have so many discordant elements in your midst that it is difficult for me to say what particular line will be taken on any occasion."⁵

A number of developments in 1935-36 brought the differences in the Mahasabha over its mission and its relationship to the Congress to a head. These included the manifest failure of the Mahasabha's campaign against the Communal Award; the growth of socialist sentiment in the Congress; and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's threat to launch a movement to convert his fellow Untouchables to a rival religious faith.

Repeal of the Communal Award rapidly became the Mahasabha's principal objective following its August 1932 promulgation by British Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald. Ostensibly a measure to protect India's minorities, the Award was anathema to the Mahasabha for it reduced caste Hindu strength in India's legislatures and this in multiple ways—by providing the Muslim elite in provinces that had a Hindu-majority "weightage", i.e. a greater share of the seats than the Muslim share of the population; by giving Hindu voters in the principal Muslim-majority provinces (Bengal and Punjab) substantially fewer seats than the Hindu share of the population; and by creating a new religio-political community, the Depressed Classes, who merited separate communal-political representation and whose seat-share was subtracted from the Hindu allotment.

If the British had resorted to such machinations, it was not because they bore any particular antipathy to caste Hindus. Their aim was to undercut the political strength of the Congress, which like the Mahasabha, drew the bulk of its support from caste Hindus.

The Mahasabha spared no effort in trying to convince the British to drop, or at least substantially modify, the Award. Parmanand headed a delegation that went to London to appear before the Joint British Parliamentary Committee studying India's

⁵ M.R. Jayakar to Ganpat Rai, 26 November 1935, Ganpat Rai Papers, Jayakar File, NMML.

proposed new constitution. But with the passage of the 1935 India Act, the Award became enshrined in law. The Mahasabha's efforts to prod the Congress into joining it in agitating against the Award were no more successful. For fear of alienating Muslims, but also because it opposed the new constitution *in toto*, the Congress refused to make the Communal Award a specific target of protest. The communal problem—including the crafting of a constitution guaranteeing the minorities full and equal participation in India's governance and development—could, the Congress contended, only be solved by freeing India from colonial shackles.

The Congress' attitude toward the Award enraged the Mahasabhites. To their mind, Hindu rights were once again being sacrificed in the thankless search for Hindu-Muslim unity. Many blamed Gandhi's civil disobedience strategy. Congress intransigence had allegedly driven the British into the arms of "the Muslims." (The Mahasabhites invariably ignored the fact that the Award left the vast majority of Indians—Muslim and Hindu—disenfranchised.) The Mahasabhites' denunciations of Congress "constitution-wrecking" and Muslim malfeasance left little room for any Mahasabha critique of the British role in inciting communal competition. Thus, whilst the Mahasabhites railed against the inequity of the Muslim seat share in Bengal, they remained largely silent about the Award allotting "Europeans," i.e. the less than 1 percent of Bengal's population that was British, fully 10 percent of the seats in the provincial assembly.

Anger over the Congress' attitude toward the Award fed into concerns about the overall direction of the Congress. Although severe government repression had compelled the Congress to abandon its 1930-32 civil disobedience campaign, many Mahasabhites

were incensed that in some areas the Congress had mounted no-rent campaigns. Rampal Singh, a prominent UP *taluqdar* and Mahasabha patron, told a government committee that he hated the Congress, then corrected himself: “what he meant was that he hated the subversive activities of the Congress.”⁶ The formation in 1934 of an avowed socialist faction within the Congress—the Congress Socialist Party—and the election of Jawarhlal Nehru as Congress president in 1936 further alarmed the Mahasabhites. G.D. Birla—Gandhi’s principal bankroller, pioneer Indian industrialist and co-founder of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry—believed Gandhi’s promotion of Nehru was an astute maneuver that would help keep the left under control. Following the Congress session, Birla wrote jubilantly to a fellow industrialist, “Mahatmaji has kept his promise, and without uttering a word he saw that *no new commitments were made*. Jawaharlalji’s speech in a way was thrown into a waste basket ...”⁷ But blinded by their own class fears and hatred, many Mahasabhites, captains of industry, and *zamindars* perceived Nehru, with his pro-socialist speeches and proposals for the Congress to organize workers and peasants, to be fomenting revolution. Declared Sir J.P. Srivastava—a Cawnpore industrialist, influential UP politician, and Mahasabha leader whom we will meet often in the pages that follow —“The programme of the Congress is positively communism. ... Jawaharlal [Nehru] is trying to pursue step by step the policy which led to Lenin’s success in Russia.”⁸

A third cause for apprehension among the Mahasabhites was the threat of

⁶ Peter Reeves, *Landlords and Governments in Uttar Pradesh* (Bombay: OUP, 1991) 180.

⁷ As cited in Basudev Chatterji, Editor’s Introduction, *Towards Freedom: Documents on the Movement for Independence in India, 1938*. Parts 1-3. (New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research, 1999) xxxvi.

⁸ Sir J.P. Srivastava to T.B. Sapru, 8 March 1937, *Towards Freedom 1937-47: Volume I—Experiment with Provincial Autonomy 1 January-31 December 1937*, ed. P.N. Chopra (New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research, 1985) 210. [Hereafter *Towards Freedom 1937*]

B.R. Ambedkar, arguably India's best-known Depressed Class politician, to lead Untouchables, beginning with his own two million-strong Mahar community, out of Hinduism. At a Bombay Depressed Classes Conference in October 1935, Ambedkar vowed that whilst he was born a Hindu, he would "not die in the Hindu religion."⁹ For many Mahasabhaites Ambedkar's threat was the realization of their worst fears, especially as Ambedkar explicitly urged Muslim and Christian leaders to show how their respective faiths would provide Untouchable converts with the most social and political benefits.

These multiple communal and class anxieties shaped the 1935-36 debate over the Mahasabha's orientation and purpose. Whilst there were many ideological shadings and a multiplicity of factions, ultimately the debate revolved around the Mahasabha's attitude toward the coming provincial elections and pitted Bhai Parmanand against Madan Mohan Malaviya in a struggle for the Mahasabha leadership. A decade earlier the two had also squared-off when the Mahasabha debated standing its own candidates in the 1926 Council elections. This time Paramanand prevailed.

The Mahasabha's post-1922 revival had been spearheaded by Madan Mohan Malaviya. But in 1929, he withdrew from active participation in its leadership after the Mahasabha rescinded support for a Congress-scheme for an all-India communal-political settlement (the Nehru Report.)¹⁰ So estranged did Malaviya and the Mahasabha become that J. Nehru thought nothing of delivering a withering attack on the Mahasabha at a November 1933 meeting chaired by Malaviya. Wrote Nehru, "[I]t did not occur to me that it was not in the best of taste to criticise the Hindu Mahasabha at a meeting presided

⁹ As cited in Eleanor Zelliot, "The Psychological Dimension of the Buddhist Movement in India," G.A. Oddie, ed., *Religion in South Asia: Religious Conversion and Revival Movements in South Asia in Medieval and Modern Times*, 2nd Edition (Delhi: Manohar, 1991) 192.

¹⁰ *IAR*, I, 1929: 359.

over by Malaviya Ji who had long been one of its pillars. I did not think of this as he had not [had] much to do with it lately and it almost seemed that the new aggressive leaders of the Mahasabha had pushed him out.”¹¹

Malaviya returned to the Mahasabha fold in the middle 1930s as part of his efforts to press the Congress into making agitation against the Communal Award—not wrecking the *Raj*’s new constitution—the pivot of its activity. Concern that Malaviya might join with the Mahasabha in an electoral bloc was among the reasons that Gandhi bowed to pressure from a group of moderate Congressmen who wanted to found a new Congress electoral party with a view to contesting the 1934 Central Assembly elections. Malaviya and, his by now close political associate, the Berar Tilakite M.S. Aney helped found the Congress Swaraj Party in the spring of 1934, but they resigned after failing to convince it to oppose and campaign against the Communal Award. With the help of Subhas and Sarat Chandra Bose and a layer of Congress Mahasabhites that included B.S. Moonje, Radha Kumud Mookherji, and the Bihari Jagat Narain Lal, Malaviya and Aney then established a rival electoral vehicle, the Congress Nationalist Party (CNP). Mahasabha Working President Parmanand welcomed Malaviya’s challenge to the Congress leadership and attended the CNP’s August 1934 founding conference. But when the CNP made Congress membership mandatory, he refused to join.¹² The CNP scored a qualified success in the fall 1934 elections, capturing 11 seats, including most of the Hindu or general seats in Bengal. (The official Congress, by contrast, won 44.) Soon after, the Democratic Swaraj Party—a party formed by the remnants of Tilak’s party in

¹¹ As cited in Parmanand, *Mahamana Madan Mohan Malaviya: An Historical Biography*, V. 2 (Varanasi: Malaviya Adhyayan Sansthan, Banaras Hindu University, 1985) 909, n. 29.

¹² Madan Mohan Malaviya and M.S. Aney, *The Congress Nationalist Party: What It Stands For. Why Every Indian Should Support It* (n.p: n.p, 1934); *IAR*, II, 1934: 260-267; Indra Prakash, *Hindu Mahasabha Its Contribution to Indian Politics*, 52; Joya Chatterjee, *Bengal Divided*, 46.

the Bombay Presidency and whose membership was comprised almost entirely of Mahsabhites—merged with the CNP, becoming its Maharashtra wing.¹³

A Mahasabha pamphlet from the mid-1930s claimed that, with the exception of Parmanand, the Mahasabha's leaders all joined the CNP.¹⁴ This was a gross exaggeration. (For one thing, in UP and Bihar many of the landlord leaders and patrons of the Mahasabha were active in overtly anti-Congress political formations, and in the Punjab the Mahasabhites had already formed their own anti-Congress legislative party.) What would be true to say is that the Congress Mahasabhites had united under the banner of the CNP and played a major role in it. The Mahasabha's office secretary, Ganpat Rai claims that the Hindu Mahasabha was the real backbone of the CNP. "The Hindu Mahasabha, he recalled, "worked for the Congress Nationalist Party," "otherwise" the CNP "had no mass contact."¹⁵

Malaviya lent stature and breadth to the anti-Communal Award movement. But Parmanand remained leery of Malaviya's Congress associations and was determined to prevent him from retaking control of the Mahasabha. In mid-1935 Ganpat Rai boasted he and Parmanand had successfully rebuffed the attempts of Malaviya and his supporters to capture the Mahasabha. "[L]et me assure you that although we had to struggle a lot, we succeeded in driving away the pro-Congress element out [sic] of the Hindu Mahasabha."¹⁶ But when the Mahasabha met in Poona for its 17th session in Dec. 1935, it was Malaviya who was in the President's chair.

¹³ *Mahratta*, 17 November 1935.

¹⁴ Ajmer Session of the Hindu Mahasabha and Report of the Hindu Mahasabha since the Ajmer Session October, 1933-April, 1934, [Should be 1935] 24, Ashutosh Lahiry Papers, Statements, (NMML).

¹⁵ Ganpat Rai Interview Transcript, NMML, 36.

¹⁶ Ganpat Rai to M.R. Jayakar, 6 August 1935, Jayakar Papers, File 630.

In light of subsequent developments, it would be worthwhile to briefly review an editorial published in the *Mahratta*, the semi-official organ of the Tilakites, welcoming Malaviya's return to the Mahasabha presidency. According to the *Mahratta*, none of the Mahasabha's leaders was "better fitted" to "keep before" the organization "its main object of [Hindu] Sangathan" and prevent its disruption by a minority of Mahasabhite extremists. Those whose "exaggerated enthusiasms" Malaviya would have to curb included:

a small section of Hindu Sabha workers who would like to establish a Hindu raj[;] ... a still smaller minority that would like to imitate the Muslims by giving up the idea of Swaraj, making peace with [the] British Government and seeking their favour for the Hindu community[;] ... a third section that would like to concentrate its attention on economic self-sufficiency of the Hindus by a sort of all-India economic boycott of Muslims[;] ... and [o]thers [who] would make the Hindu Sabha a rival to the Congress in political matters ... and contest Council elections on the Hindu Sabha ticket.¹⁷

The record will show that not only did Malaviya fail to curb such sentiments, the extremists effectively drove him from the organization. Little more than two years after the Mahasabha's Poona session, the Mahasabha would be relaunched, under the leadership of V.D. Savarkar as a political party openly hostile to the Congress, militantly Hindu nationalist, and increasingly explicit in its support for a Hindu-British alliance. Ironically, among Savarkar's most ardent supporters would be the *Mahratta* and the Tilakite Democratic Swaraj Party.

The impending split between Malaviya and the Mahasabhite majority was foreshadowed at the Poona session, when, to Malaviya's utter dismay, the delegates failed to pass a motion congratulating the Congress on the occasion of its silver jubilee.¹⁸

¹⁷ *Mahratta*, 15 December 1935.

¹⁸ *Mahratta*, 5 January 1936.

Malaviya meanwhile ruffled many feathers when he ruled out of order a motion that advocated interdining as a means of removing the stigma of untouchability.¹⁹

Three main issues divided Malaviya from the Mahasabha majority in 1936—the Mahasabha's attitude toward the Congress and the coming provincial elections; a dispute over control of the provincial Hindu Sabha in Malaviya's home province, the United Provinces; and a pact that the Maharashtran Mahasabhites reached with Ambedkar and sought to have endorsed by the all-India body (the Moonje-Ambedkar Pact.)

The second issue was tied to first. Because Sir J.P. Srivastava and fellow Cawnpore industrialist Vikramjit Singh shared his aversion to the Congress, Parmanand supported their efforts to exclude Malaviya's supporters from the leadership of the UP Provincial Hindu Sabha. When a dispute arose over the validity of the 1936 UP Provincial Hindu Sabha Working Committee elections, Parmanand organised for the all-India body to recognize the Srivastava group as the rightful leaders, even while conceding that there had been irregularities in the election.²⁰ In the Mahasabha, policy disputes were frequently resolved through factional-organizational means. Nonetheless, the UP dispute merits mention, because it added to the bad blood between Malaviya and Parmanand and because, as we shall see below, it ultimately became a mechanism for excluding Malaviya's supporters from the organization.

The Moonje-Ambedkar Pact likewise contributed to the estrangement between Malaviya and the Mahasabha majority, in this case particularly with Malaviya's old-

¹⁹ S.L. Gupta, *Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya: A Socio-Political Study* (Allahabad: Chugh Publications, 1978) 308

²⁰ HMS Papers, C-10; B.R. Tomlinson, *The Indian National Congress and the Raj: The Penultimate Phase, 1929-42* (London: MacMillan, 1976) 76. Malaviya supported the Raja of Tirwa in his bid for re-election as UP Hindu Sabha President, but the Raja and his supporters walked out of the elections claiming irregularities. Tirwa had worked closely with Malaviya in the past, assisting his efforts to revive the Mahasabha in the early 1920s and winning election to the UP Legislative Council in 1926 as a candidate of the Malaviya-led Independent Congress Party.

Congress comrades in arms, the Tilakites, who were the pact's most enthusiastic promoters. The pact also warrants our attention at this juncture because it reveals the extent to which the Mahasabha had already become a consciously political organization in which questions of religious doctrine were subordinated to the communal-political struggle.²¹

The Mahasabhis had made opposing Ambedkar's conversion threat the principal theme of their December 1935 session in Poona and succeeded in mobilizing for the session many of the most prominent Depressed Class leaders, including Jagjivan Ram, who would subsequently gain renown as the most prominent Congress *Harijan*. Dr. Kurtkoti the Shankacharya of Karweer Pith moved a resolution that proclaimed, "Untouchability must not be regarded as a part of Hindu religion or social system." The session also established a 21-member committee charged with drawing up a five-year plan for improving the conditions of the Depressed Classes and named to it the Mahasabha's foremost leaders as well as Jagjivan Ram and at least a half-dozen other prominent Depressed Class leaders.²²

Yet rather than acting on these resolutions, the Mahasabha leadership in Maharashtra, which felt most threatened by Ambedkar since he was a fellow-Maratha, sought a political accommodation with him. As the result of secret negotiations between Moonje and Ambedkar, it was agreed that if Ambedkar spurned the offers of Muslim and Christian leaders and led a movement to convert Untouchables to Sikhism, the

²¹ The pact is reproduced in *IAR*, II, 1936: 276-77.

²² *All-India Hindu Mahasabha. 17th Session Poona, December 1935: Full Text of Resolutions*, Jayakar Papers, File 65. For more on the session and the Moonje-Ambedkar see my, "Trading in religio-political identities?: The 1936 Moonje-Ambedkar Pact."

Mahasabha for its part would press the government to extend the political rights given Untouchables under the 1932 Poona Pact to the Sikh converts.²³

In pressing for the Mahasabha to support the Moonje-Ambedkar Pact, the Maharashtran Mahasabhites argued that it was in keeping with the principles of Hindu *sangathan*, since the Sikhs, by virtue of their faith being Indian in origin, could be and should be considered Hindus. As long as Ambedkar agreed that for political purposes the Untouchables were Hindus and kept his promise to oppose Muslim and Christian prostelyzing efforts among the Untouchables, Mahasabhites should be disinterested in which strand of Hinduism they professed, or so went the argument.

In truth, the pact relieved the Maharashtra Mahasabhites of the obligation to figuratively, and (from the standpoint of Hindu ritual practices) literally, soil their hands in anti-untouchability work and risk riling the orthodox. M.C. Rajah, a Pariah from Madras Presidency and Ambedkar rival, issued a biting attack on the Moonje-Ambedkar pact precisely on these lines. He accused the Mahasabha of having devised a means of segregating the Untouchables from Hindu society, while retaining them as fodder for the communal-political power struggle. Rather than working to remove caste disabilities, “you are dissecting the Depressed Classes and affiliating them religiously to the Sikhs while retaining them politically as Hindus.”²⁴

²³ An agreement between caste Hindu and Untouchable political leaders (including Gandhi, Madan Mohan Malaviya, and Ambedkar) the Poona Pact amended Ramsay Macdonald's Communal Award as it pertained to Untouchable political representation. In delivering his Award, the British Prime Minister had pledged to amend it, if and when, the leaders of the various British-defined religious-political communities agreed to modify its terms. Subsequently the British Indian government promulgated a Schedule identifying those groups that, because they were victims of Untouchability, were entitled to reserved legislative seats and government jobs. Conversion threatened to deprive the Untouchable converts of these political rights because the *Raj*'s concept of Depressed Classes/Scheduled Castes/Untouchables—and this was reinforced by the Poona Pact—was predicated on their being Hindus.

²⁴ *IAR* 1936: V. 2, 279. While his criticisms of the Maharashtran Mahasabhites were apt, Rajah's own perspective of sanskritization was far from unproblematic. Significantly, he did not criticize threats made

The Moonje-Ambedkar pact met with a stormy reception in the Mahasabha. Many Arya Samajists, including the long-time treasurer of the Hindu Mahasabha, Lal Narayan Dutt, felt the Mashabaha was boosting Sikh prostelyzation efforts over their own. Punjabi Mahasabhites expressed concern about a further strengthening of the Sikh community. (Notwithstanding the Mahasabha's claim that the Sikhs were Hindus, the Khalsa Sikhs had, with support from the colonial state, developed a strong sense that they constituted a separate community needing separate representation in India's political institutions, thus making the communal-political struggle in the Punjab a three-cornered affair.) The Depressed Class politicians who had joined with the Mahasabha to denounce Ambedkar's conversion threat felt betrayed.

Our concern here however is with Malaviya. A devout Brahmin Hindu, he could not countenance supporting conversion from orthodox Hinduism in the name of the *realpolitik* of communal-political struggle. He opposed the Moonje-Ambedkar Pact and encouraged opposition from fellow *sanatanists* as well as from Rajah and other Depressed Class leaders.

The pivotal issue in Malaviya's parting of the ways from the Mahasabha was his opposition to the Mahasabha contesting the coming provincial elections. As preparations for the elections began in earnest in the summer of 1936, Malaviya came under pressure from the Congress High Command to help engineer some sort of CNP-Congress electoral understanding. Malaviya, meanwhile, was increasingly feeling out of place within the Mahasabha. Whilst he was a Hindu *sangathanist* and could therefore be militantly anti-Muslim, he remained an Indian nationalist and loyal, at least up to a degree, to the

by Congress and Mahasabha leaders to use the terms of the Poona Pact to try to prevent Ambedkar's conversion movement.

Congress. On occasion, Malaviya had raised the possibility of opening the CNP to non-Congressmen; but he appears never to have wavered in his opposition to the Mahasabha transforming itself into a Hindu party and challenging the Congress as the self-proclaimed political representative of the Hindus.²⁵ As an enticement to Malaviya, the Bose brothers in Bengal, and other more moderate elements, the Congress leadership issued a condemnation of the Communal Award, even conceding that agitation against it was not necessarily impermissible.²⁶

While Malaviya was moving away from the Mahasabha, many in the Mahasabha who had allied with him were now anxious to be rid of the Congress connection. In something of an internal revolution, the Democratic Swaraj Party (DSP) moved in August 1936 to throw open its membership to non-Congressmen and shunted aside N.C. Kelkar, Tilak's former deputy, for a younger leadership ready to cross swords with the Congress.²⁷

On assuming the DSP leadership, L.B. Bhopatkar launched a tirade against the Congress, accusing it of serving as a stalking horse for communism and preaching the destruction of religion. Commented one longtime Mahasabha member and *Mahratta* contributor, "Those who are running the Democratic [Swaraj Party] Parliamentary Board seem to have centered all their attention upon the bogey of Communism in Congress. They seem to take it for granted that the [DSP] ... has voted in favour of fascism or some other conservative ideology."²⁸

²⁵ Eg. Ganpat Rai to B.S. Moonje, 27 July 1935, Moonje Papers (NMML), File 42.

²⁶ Parmanand, *Mahamana Madan Mahan Malaviya*, V. 2, 945-47.

²⁷ *Mahratta*, 9 August 1936.

²⁸ *Mahratta*, 11 October 1936.

Thus it is not entirely clear who parted from whom—Malaviya and his CNP from the Mahasabha or the DSP from the CNP. By stipulating that each of its provincial branches would pursue its own electoral understanding with the Congress, the CNP leadership, at Malaviya's behest, gave the much more powerful and centralized Congress carte blanche. In Bengal, UP, and Berar, where the Congress felt an alliance with CNP would be electorally helpful and that its leaders could be expected to adhere to Congress discipline, the Congress struck an alliance with the CNP that effectively resulted in the latter re-merging with the Congress. Elsewhere, the Congress saw nothing to be gained. Thus Vallabhbhai Patel, acting on behalf of the Congress High Command, scuttled an electoral pact Moonje had negotiated with N.B. Khare, the head of the Congress party in the Nagpur region of the Central Provinces and a once and future Mahasabha leader.²⁹

This had not yet all played out when the Mahasabha met in annual session in Lahore in October 1936. But the writing was on the wall. Malaviya did not even attend. His supporters were denied delegate credentials on the grounds that the only true Hindu Sabhas in UP were those accredited by the provincial body led by Srivastava and Vikramjit Singh. When Malaviya's nephew, Krishna Kant Malaviya, a CNP member of the Central Assembly, and several other of Malaviya's associates sought to enter the Mahasabha *pandal*, they were greeted with taunts. A scuffle ensued.³⁰ Later Parmanand told the session "it would be suicidal" for Hindus "to entrust their interests to the Congress Nationalists."³¹

The Mahasabha's internal struggle in 1935-36 left it weakened, but in so far as it resulted in a definitive break with Malaviya and other pro-Congress elements it

²⁹ This is documented in Moonje Papers, File 46 (A), NMML.

³⁰ *IAR*, 1936, V. 2, 259; Parmanand, *Mahamana Madan Mahan Malaviya*, V. 2, 942-943.

³¹ *IAR*, 1936: V. 2, p. 261.

anticipated and helped prepare the way for Savarkar's recasting of the Mahasabha as a Hindu nationalist political party.

Before proceeding, it is important to underline that the break between the Mahasabha and the Congress was motivated not just by dissatisfaction with the latter's failure to oppose the Communal Award, but also by opposition to the Congress' efforts to rally worker-peasant support for the nationalist cause. The Democratic Swaraj Party, which in November 1936 passed a resolution declaring that it and the Hindu Mahasabha were "one and the same," made fighting Communism and upholding the khoti system of land tenure principal campaign themes.³² Some DSP candidates even stood as joint DSP-Khoti Sabha candidates. The "Election Manifesto" Moonje drafted on behalf of the Nagpur Hindu Sabha repeated the Mahasabha's standard denunciations of the Congress policy of "renunciation and surrender" to the Muslims. But it was to the growth of left-wing sentiment in the Congress that Moonje pointed—not the Congress' stance on the communal question—when explaining why the Mahasabha had lost hope in ever seeing the day "when the Congress may grow wiser" and "join hands in co-operation with the Mahasabha." The election of the "communist" Jawaharlal Nehru to the Congress presidency, wrote Moonje, meant that the Mahasabha's differences with the Congress were becoming "fundamental and unadjustable."³³

II: The 1937 Elections—a Watershed in Indian Politics

Eight years in the making, the 1935 India Act was intended to erect a political-constitutional order that would preserve British power in India for a generation or more.

³² Resolution cited in *Mahratta*, 29 November 1936; see also *Mahratta* 8 January and 2 April, 1937. Declared the "Hindu Mahasabha Election Bulletin," "Democratic Swaraj Party is for all practical purposes the Hindu Sabha Party." Jayakar Papers, File 65.

³³ "Nagpur Hindu Sabha's Election Manifesto," Jayakar Papers, File 65.

Events, however, quickly demonstrated that India's colonial overlords lacked the requisite strength and support to preclude further challenges to their rule.

The Indian National Congress emerged from the 1937 provincial elections—the first under the new constitution—as far and away the country's largest political force. In six of the seven provinces that had a majority Hindu population, the Congress captured or came within a whisker of capturing a majority of the seats.³⁴ By the same token, the parties that had traditionally enjoyed British Indian government patronage were routed.

British assertions to the contrary, it was clear that India's constitution was unsettled. The election results immediately posed the question would Congress agree to take office under the provisions of the India Act, thus threatening to undermine the *Raj* from within, or would the British be compelled to rule by emergency decree (Section 93), thus admitting they had failed to contain the Indian nationalist challenge.

From a longer term perspective, the elections ushered in a new period of political turmoil, one which would be increasingly stoked by the approach, then outbreak, of World War II. The perception of *Raj* weakness led to a dramatic intensification of social conflict, as various indigenous propertied and elite groups mobilized to press their rival claims for political power and to defend their socio-economic interests.

Here a key Congress weakness—a weakness highlighted by the elections—would prove pivotal: its lack of support among India's Muslims. The Congress won just 26 of the 482 provincial assembly seats allotted to Muslims. If in the Hindu-majority provinces the almost five-fold increase in the percentage of Indians having the right to vote and the resulting shift of political power to the *mofussil* (countryside) benefited the

³⁴ Political & Economic Information Department of the All-India Congress Committee, "A Brief Analysis of the Election Results," reproduced in *IAR*, 1937: II, 168 (A)- 168 (P); Tomlinson, 71.

Congress, in the principal Muslim-majority provinces, Bengal and the Punjab, the beneficiaries were explicitly Muslim or Muslim-led parties.

The Mahasabhites had long criticized the Congress for its civil disobedience tactics, arguing against boycotts of the legislatures and for Council entry and office acceptance. Thus it was especially galling for them to find that in the both the Hindu-and Muslim-majority provinces the elections had resulted in their adversaries gaining greater power and popular legitimacy.

The Mahasabhites had entered the election contest exuding confidence. "This year," affirmed Mahasabha General Secretary Padmaraj Jain, "we are giving a good fight to the Congress in election matters practically in all provinces except Madras ..."³⁵ Actually, the campaign exposed the Mahasabha's organizational weakness and even more dramatically its lack of popular support. The Mahasabha did not mount a national campaign, nor even issue a national election program. The various provincial Hindu Sabhas mounted their own campaigns and struck their own alliances. To Parmanand's chagrin, most of the UP landlords and business magnates who patronized the Hindu Mahasabha, including Sir J.P. Srivastava, threw their money and electoral support behind the National Agriculturalists' Parties.³⁶ The NAPs (there was one for Agra, another for Oudh) were inter-communal, having been established to defend the interests of the landlords—Hindu and Muslim alike—against the Congress, and unabashed in their support of the *Raj*. Adding to

³⁵ Padmaraj Jain to M.R. Jayakar, 27 December 1936, Jayakar Papers, File 65.

³⁶ Ganpat Rai to J.P. Srivastava, 12 December 1936, Ganpat Rai Papers, Correspondence; Indra Prakash, *History of the Hindu Mahasabha*, 1938 edition, 240.

the Mahasabha's difficulties in the UP was the aggressive campaign mounted against it and in support of the Congress by Madan Mohan Malaviya.³⁷

Across India only a smattering of Mahasabha candidates were successful. None of the 21 Mahasabha candidates for the UP Assembly was elected.³⁸ Reporting on the campaign in the Central Provinces, Moonje wrote, "We have fought our election on the manifesto of the Hindu Sabha. ... But we have been swept off the board."³⁹ The Mahasabha-aligned Democratic Swaraj Party won 5 of 175 Bombay Assembly seats and 2 of the 26 seats in the presidency's upper chamber. The Mahasabha did moderately better in the Muslim-majority provinces, where Mahasabha claims of impending Muslim domination had greater resonance, but only in comparison. The Mahasabha-aligned National Progressive Party (NPP) won 11 seats in the 175-seat Punjab assembly, far short of its expectations. Thanks in part to the backing of the British, the NPP had served since its founding as a junior partner in ministries led by the predominantly-Muslim Unionist Party, and it went into the elections confident it would remain a major influence in Punjab's government. But the Unionists had less need of the NPP after the 1937 elections. For one thing, they had won a majority of the assembly seats. For another, thanks to their Hindu deputy leader, Chotthu Ram, and his appeals to anti-commercial (urban *bania*/moneylender) sentiment and Jat caste consciousness, the Unionists had attracted strong support from the landlords and better-off peasants of the Harayana region and thereby significantly increased their Hindu representation. Last but not least, the NPP had seen its relative strength in the assembly

³⁷ Both the British (*UP Intelligence Abstracts*, 13 February 1937, 154) and Congress leaders believed Malaviya's campaigning had been highly damaging to the Mahasabha. Wrote Jawaharlal Nehru to Malaviya, 26 February 1937, "Your general and particular support of many Congress candidates has been of great value to us." (All-India Congress Committee Papers, E-17/1937, NMML).

³⁸ Peter Reeves et al, *Elections in Uttar Pradesh, 1920-1951* (Delhi: Manohar, 1975); Indra Prakash, *History of the Hindu Mahasabha*, 1938 edition, 240.

³⁹ B.S. Moonje to M.R. Jayakar, 21 February, 1937, Jayakar Papers, File 65.

more than halved. Congress did better than expected, reported the Punjab Governor, its successes “obtained almost entirely at the expense of the Nationalist Progressive Party representing urban Hindus of the Hindu Sabha school.”⁴⁰

The British had hopes B.C. Chatterjee, the longtime Bengal Mahasabha leader and son-in law of the nationalist giant Surendranath Banerji, could mount a challenge to the Congress in Bengal. But the Bengal Provincial Hindu Sabha, never a bulwark of the all-India organization, suffered a debilitating split shortly before the elections and Chatterjee’s grouping proved, in the words of Bengal’s governor, to be “a damp squib.”⁴¹ In the tiny North-West Frontier Province, the Mahasabha-aligned Hindu-Sikh Nationalist Party won 7 seats. In Sind, where the Mahasabha had led opposition to the separation of the Sindhi-speaking Muslim-majority area from the Bombay Presidency, the Mahasabha claimed that 11 of its candidates were victorious. The Congress reported just 4 Mahasabhites elected. This discrepancy only highlights the fact that those who flew the Mahasabha standard in Sind did not constitute a party and were not subject to any effective Mahasabha discipline.

Whilst the Mahasabhites in the Hindu-majority provinces were dismayed and dispirited at the triumph of their Congress rivals, those in the Muslim-majority provinces had an even greater sense of vulnerability.

Buoyed by their triumph at the polls, the Punjab Unionists pushed through amendments to the Punjab Land Alienation Act and other legislation disadvantageous to Hindu commercial interests. As a result, the NPP’s policy of supporting Unionist-led Ministries with the aim of pressing the claims of the Hindu urban commercial elite and gaining patronage and other ammunition to fight the Congress fell further and further into

⁴⁰ Emerson to Linlithgow, 22 February 1937, *Towards Freedom 1937*, 165.

⁴¹ Anderson to Linlithgow, 8 February 1937, *Towards Freedom 1937*, 108.

disrepute even among Mahasabhites. Policy disputes and factional rivalry caused the NPP to split in the fall of 1937 and again in the fall of 1938.⁴² While ultimately just 3 NPP legislators were left supporting the Unionists, the in-fighting divided and discredited the Punjab Hindu Sabha, reducing it “to only the shell of an organization outside Lahore city.”⁴³

In Bengal, unlike the Punjab, the Hindu middle and upper classes had been able to maintain their political predominance during the period between the coming into force of the 1919 and 1935 India Acts. The 1937 elections produced an abrupt change. The extension of the franchise and the Communal Award gave Muslim politicians new leverage. The Bengal Muslim League and the Krishak Praja Party (KPP)—the principal Muslim parties—had distinct social bases, made different appeals, and were bitter rivals in the 1937 election. The symbol of the League was the Nawab of Dacca. A party of the Muslim elite, the League in Bengal was hostile to the Congress and in the 1937 elections sought to rally support with rank communal appeals. Led by Fazl Huq, the KPP claimed to be the voice of Bengal’s oppressed Muslim peasantry—in fact its principal base was a section of well-to-do peasants, the *jotedars*—and expressed sympathy with the Congress. The Mahasabhites made no distinction between the two parties. If the League’s anti-Hindu bigotry riled them, they felt no less agitated by the KPP’s promise of agrarian reform, including the abolition of *zamindari*. When the Muslim League and KPP combined in a coalition government—both were eager for office and buckled under British pressure that Congress obstruction not be allowed to cause the suspension of the

⁴² Emerson to Linlithgow, 18 December 1937, *Towards Freedom 1937*, 1274; Satya M. Rai, *Legislative Politics and Freedom Struggle in the Punjab 1897-1947* (New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research, 1984) 243-253.

⁴³ B. Cleghorn, “Religion and Politics: The leadership of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha in Punjab and Maharashtra, 1920-1939,” in *Leadership in South Asia*, ed. B.N. Pandey (New Delhi: Vikas, 1977) 423.

constitution—the Mahasabhites and much of the Hindu middle class bitterly complained that Bengal had succumbed to Muslim rule. Their fear, which was not entirely without foundation, was that the newly empowered Muslim political elite would redirect the flow of government patronage and otherwise use the levers of power to reward their followers. Ultimately, the Mahasabha would succeed in tapping into a growing current among the Bengali *bhadralok* that only a more muscular, explicitly Hindu communal politics could stop a dangerous and irreversible erosion of their privileges.

To summarize, prior to the 1937 elections the Mahasabhites had perceived themselves on the defensive and this anxiety had helped propel the Mahasabha into the electoral arena. The elections, however, further confined the Mahasabhites to the political margins. In the Hindu-majority provinces the Congress became the governing party; in the Muslim-majority provinces, the Muslim elite used the new power that had accrued to it as a result of the 1935 constitution to attack the privileges of the Hindu economic and political elites from which the Mahasabha drew the bulk of its support.

The Mahasabhites & the Interim Ministries

In the interests of clarity, this account has postponed discussion of a telling development—the participation of many of the most politically powerful Mahasabhites in the 1937 interim ministries.

Whilst the results of the 1937 elections were a serious blow to the British, they were not a crushing one. Rapidly *Raj* strategists determined that their aim should be to entice the Congress into accepting office, without however ceding to the Congress' demands for changes to the constitution. Such an outcome would not only save the British from having to suspend the constitution, and thereby gravely undermining its

legitimacy. By providing the Congress with a measure of governmental power, the British hoped to provoke a split, and transform the Congress right-wing into long-term junior partners in governing the *Raj*.

The Congress, for its part, sought to use the India Act stipulation that its provincial provisions were to come into force on April 1, 1937 to push for limitations on the powers of the provincial governors. To the Congress' surprise, the British found a way to finesse the deadline by installing interim ministries in the provinces where the Congress was dominant. The British knew full-well that these ministries would be defeated should the legislatures ever be called into session. But their existence meant the constitution could remain operative while the British pressed the Congress to accept office under the terms of the India Act.

Mahasabhites figured prominently amongst those who served in the interim ministries. Three of the seven members of the UP interim ministry were active in the Mahasabha: Srivastava, Maheshwar Dayal Seth (who like Srivastava would subsequently become a nationally known Mahasabha leader) and the Raja of Tirwa, the president of the UP Provincial Hindu Sabha from 1933 to 1936. Jamnadas Mehta, parliamentary leader of the Mahasabha-aligned DSP, was the key figure in the Bombay Presidency interim ministry even if he did not have the title of Chief Minister. According to Bombay Governor Bradbourne, Mehta was "the moving spirit of my Cabinet," the "chief minister in all but name."⁴⁴ B.G. Khaparde, a close associate of Moonje, served in the interim ministry in the Central Provinces, and Mehr Chand Khanna, the leader of the Hindu-Sikh Nationalist Party and longtime provincial Hindu Sabha president, was Finance Minister in the NWFP's interim ministry.

⁴⁴ Bradbourne to Linlithgow, 6 May and 5 June, 1937, *Towards Freedom 1937*, 601 and 625

The Mahasabhites, especially Mehta and Srivastava, were chagrined at having to warm seats for their Congress rivals and, in flights of fancy, schemed at cobbling together the legislative majorities needed to make the interim ministries permanent.⁴⁵ But if the Mahasabhites joined the interim ministries it was not only because they were after pelf and position. They feared that a breakdown of the new constitution would lead to mass civil disobedience and raise the specter of revolution.

The Congress press denounced the interim ministers for violating the spirit of democracy. But the Congress right-wing came to recognize that they were a useful buffer, that gave it the time needed to overcome resistance within Congress ranks to office-acceptance and to develop a formula that would allow both the Congress and *Raj* to claim that they had won the game of brinkmanship over the constitution.

The importance of the interim ministry episode is two-fold: it further underscores the marginalization of the Mahasabhites. Prior to the elections, some Mahasabhites had envisaged that they would be in office; instead they had to content themselves with the shadow of power wielded by the interim ministries. Second, and more importantly, this episode demonstrates that by 1937 the Mahasabha was a nesting-ground for a layer of anti-Congress politicians closely-aligned to the British regime. It thus presages the attempt to transform the Mahasabha into a mass communal party and right-wing rival to the Congress. Significantly, when the Mahasabha met in its annual session at the end of 1937, it passed a resolution congratulating "the interim Hindu ministers who accepted office in the teeth of opposition ... and thus prevented a breakdown of the constitution."⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Bradbourne to Linlithgow, 6 May and 19 July, 1937, L/PJ/5/155, IOL; Haig to Linlithgow, 7 April 1937, *Towards Freedom 1937*, 348.

⁴⁶ Resolutions of the 1937 Ahmedabad Hindu Mahasabha Session, Jayakar Papers, File 65.

The Muslim League, the Mahasabha and the crisis of the UP landlords

Historians have long identified 1937 as a decisive turning point in the development of the Muslim League. The League fared poorly in the 1937 elections, at least in comparison with the Congress. It captured slightly more than a fifth of all the Muslim seats in India's provincial assemblies, but took just 4.4% of the total Muslim vote. With its support concentrated in the Congress-dominated Hindu-majority provinces, the League found itself excluded from office everywhere but Bengal. It responded to its marginalization by becoming much more communally aggressive.

At the League's October 1937 session, League President M.A. Jinnah emphatically rejected the claim that the Muslims were a minority, however large. Rather they constituted a separate nation. Less than two and a half year's later, the League gave the claim of Muslim nationhood a territorial dimension, demanding that one or more sovereign states be created out of the Muslim-majority units of India.

The League's embrace of the "two-nation" theory was accompanied by visceral attacks on the Congress. The League charged the Congress ministries with suppressing the Muslims and held up its refusal to recognize the League as the sole spokesmen of India's Muslims as proof of its Hindu communalism.

Needless to say, the veracity of the League's charges continues to be hotly contested. The ease with which Madan Mohan Malaviya and his supporters could pass from the Mahasabha platform to that of the Congress certainly indicates that India's premier nationalist organization was not free of Hindu bias. Some of the measures taken by the Congress provincial ministries, if not self-consciously anti-Muslim, did reveal a disregard for Muslim sensitivities and sensibilities (e.g. the Wardha education scheme and promotion

of *Bande Mataram*).⁴⁷ That said, the British, who generally were not favorably disposed to the Congress and had enshrined in India's constitution the notion that the Muslims constituted a discrete community requiring separate representation, viewed the League's charges of discrimination as in the main grossly exaggerated and often patently false. Many of the purported Muslim grievances, observed the UP Governor, had "nothing specifically Muslim" about them, but rather were "the stock-in-trade of the [right-wing] opposition, voiced by non-Congress Hindus just as much as by Muslims ..."⁴⁸ Summing up the debate, the old India hand Reginald Coupland wrote,

An impartial investigator would come ... to the conclusion that many of the charges were exaggerated ... that many of the incidents complained of were due to the irresponsible members of the Congress Party, that the case against the Congress governments deliberately pursuing an anti-Moslem policy was certainly not proved. The real grievance, in fact, was not so much that the Moslems were harshly or even unfairly treated as that they were excluded from the share of power to which they felt themselves entitled.⁴⁹

In raising the specter of Hindu *Raj*, Jinnah frequently referred to the Hindu Mahasabha "[T]he majority community have clearly shown their hand that Hindusthan is for the Hindus," Jinnah told the League's 1937 session. "[O]nly the Congress masquerades under the name of nationalism whereas the Hindu Mahasabha does not mince words."⁵⁰

The communal radicalization of the League forms a compelling parallel with the post-1937 transformation of the Hindu Mahasabha. In aggressive communalism, sections

⁴⁷ Mushirul Hasan, *India's Partition: Process, Strategy and Mobilization* (Delhi: OUP, 1993) 152.

⁴⁸ Haig to Linlithgow, 10 May 1939, *The Paradoxes of Partition*, V. 1, ed. S.A.I. Tirmizi, (New Delhi : Centre for Federal Studies, Hamdard University, 1998) 659-662. See also the comments of the Governor of Bihar in Maurice Hallett to Linlithgow, 8 May, 1939, *The Paradoxes of Partition*, V. 1, 654-657.

⁴⁹ As cited in Ramji Lal, *Political India, 1935-1942: Anatomy of Indian Politics* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1986) 63.

⁵⁰ *Towards Freedom 1937*, 1033-34.

of the elite that feared the growing power of the Congress found a distinctive program with potential mass appeal.

That said, there is a decisive difference in the post-1937 development of the League and of the Mahasabha. The League was successful in transforming itself into a mass organization. Already by the time the League raised the demand for a Muslim state or states it had rallied behind it the Muslim landlords of UP, the traditional pillar of Muslim influence in north India, and was establishing an important base of support among the urban and rural masses of UP and Bihar. Becoming the premier political force in the Muslim-majority provinces proved to be far more problematic. The Punjab and Bengal governments jealously guarded their provincial autonomy. But the calculation of the principal Muslim politicians in the Punjab and Bengal that they needed some sort of counterweight to the Congress, given its new relationship with the *Raj*, and their consequent readiness to acknowledge the League as the representative of Muslims in all-India politics did much to boost the League's claim to be an equal of the Congress.

Discussion of the many factors that contributed to the Muslim League's rapid rise go well beyond the purview of this dissertation. But the cementing of the League-landlord relationship in UP merits our consideration, because it coincided with many of the most politically active UP Hindu landlords shifting their orientation and making the Mahasabha the focus of their attempts to oppose the Congress. The notion of a Muslim League-Hindu Mahasabha parallel does not do justice to this phenomenon, however. As the ensuing discussion will show, the turn to communal politics on the part of the Muslim and Hindu landlords of UP was almost a mutual decision. This does not mean, however, that as the stakes grew and communal relations deteriorated, the protagonists of this

policy did not themselves increasingly succumb to communal passions and view events through a communal prism.

Dating back to the Permanent Settlement in Bengal, an essential element of *Raj* strategy in north India, including the UP, was the promotion of a landlord order—a class of titled, politically empowered big landlords. With British backing, the UP landlords had been the dominant force in the Provincial Council from its founding and they entered the campaign for the 1937 elections confident that they would maintain their dominance through the newly-formed Agriculturalists' Parties.⁵¹ This was a colossal miscalculation. The Congress won 133 Legislative Assembly seats, the NAPs but 25, including just eight general (or Hindu) constituencies.

Writing in 1935, the *taluqdar* and Mahasabha patron Rampal Singh observed that many UP landlords kept “two arrows to the string of their bow. Their one foot is in the Hindu Mahasabha, the Muslim League, the Muslim Conference or similar sectional institution and the other in the National Agriculturalists' Party.”⁵² In the 1936-37 elections, most of the landlords chose to fire the National Agriculturalists' arrow. Prominent Mahasabhite *taluqdars* such as the Raja of Tilio, Maheshwar Dayal Seth (Raja of Kotra), and Hari Ram Seth of Maurawan, ran as NAP candidates and in this they were encouraged by Srivastava and other anti-Congress business magnates. Similarly, most of the big Muslim landlords spurned Jinnah's appeals they accept League tickets. “In the United Provinces,” Nawab Mohammad Yusuf told Jinnah, “the combination that has worked is the combination of the Hindu landlords and the Muslims ...”⁵³

⁵¹ Haig to Linlithgow, 17 February 1937, *Towards Freedom 1937*, 143; Reeves, *Landlords*, 225-226.

⁵² As cited in Reeves, *Landlords*, 217.

⁵³ As cited in Salil Misra, *A Narrative of Communal Politics: Uttar Pradesh, 1937-39* (New Delhi: Sage, 2001) 52.

The results of the 1937 elections showed that with the extension of the franchise and the emergence of Congress-led and independent *kisan* (peasant) movements, the landlords could no longer defend their interests through parties openly identified with them. Consequently, many now chose to fire what Rampal Singh had described as their second arrow—communal politics.

As early as the spring of 1937, there was much discussion among the landlords and industrialists of the UP about using communalism as a weapon to fight the Congress. Indeed, some of these discussions took place in interim cabinet meetings presided over by UP Governor Haig. The Muslim landlords were the most ready to adopt this course. But not because they were more communally-minded than their Hindu counterparts. The NAP election effort had been gravely undermined by Srivastava's use of Hindu communal appeals in his bid to supplant Nawab Chhatari as the party's candidate for chief minister. If the Muslim landlords took the initiative, it was because they were in the stronger position. Many more of them had won election; in the League, they had a much better-established potential vehicle; and it was easier to bait the predominantly Hindu Congress as anti-Muslim, than denounce it from a Hindu communal perspective.

Reported Haig on a meeting of the interim cabinet in mid-May 1937,

There was some discussion about the possibility of organizing non-Congress Hindus **also** [my emphasis] on communal lines, and some of the Ministers maintained that this could most certainly be done, but it could only be done by adopting an aggressively Hindu policy[,] e.g. stopping cow-slaughter. I put it to them that it was really inconceivable that two parties organized on communal lines and really for purposes of opposing each other on these communal lines, could ever coalesce and work together [against the Congress].⁵⁴

Less than two weeks later Haig told the Viceroy,

⁵⁴ Haig, 16 May 1937, *Towards Freedom 1937*, 518.

The Muslim members intend to give primary allegiance to the Muslim League, and are determined not to come into a non-communal party ... The non-Congress Hindus are left by this decision in a difficult position and without any organization of their own. I sincerely trust they will not succumb to the temptation of arraying themselves under their communal organization, namely the Hindu Mahasabha, for that would make co-operation between non-Congress Hindus and Muslims impossible.⁵⁵

But they did succumb. So did many of Srivastava's fellow industrialists. Lord Wavell, the Viceroy in the latter stages of World War II, recorded in his diary a conversation he had in 1944 with Srivastava, then the Mahasabha's representative in the British India cabinet:

Srivastava . . . today told me that, after the Congress success at the polls and assumption of office in U.P. in 1937, the leading industrialists—all I think Hindu—got together and decided to finance Jinnah and the Muslim League and also the Mahasabha, as the extreme communal parties, to oppose Congress who they feared might threaten their financial profits.⁵⁶

The Muslim League's own Pripur report provides further proof of an alliance between the Hindu and Muslim landlords to promote communal political mobilization. So strong, it says, was the opposition of some Muslim *zamindars* to the Congress that they had supported the Mahasabha candidate in a 1938 by-election.⁵⁷

The turn of the landlords to communal politics gained new urgency in response to two Congress initiatives—the Pant Ministry's push for land reform and the Congress' attempt to win the support of Muslim peasants, artisans and industrial workers through its Muslim Mass Contact Campaign. For the Muslim landlords, the mass contact campaign was doubly threatening. Not only did it challenge their claim to be the political representatives of Muslims, but by appealing to the socio-economic discontent of poor Muslims and stressing the common class interests shared by Muslim and Hindu peasants,

⁵⁵ Haig to Linlithgow, 24 May 1937, *Towards Freedom 1937*, 580.

⁵⁶ Lord Wavell, *The Viceroy's Journal*, ed. Penderel Moon (London: OUP, 1973) 102.

⁵⁷ *Report of the Inquiry Committee Appointed by the Council of All-India Muslim League to Inquire into the Grievances in Congress Provinces* (n.p.: Liaquat Ali Khan, Honorary Secretary, All India Muslim League, 1938-39) 11.

it constituted a threat to their wealth and economic power.⁵⁸ The Congress, the League charged, wanted to “divide and weaken and break the Musalmans” by detaching “them from their accredited leaders.” “All the talk of hunger and poverty is intended to lead the people toward socialistic and communistic ideas for which India is far from prepared.”⁵⁹ Mahasabha opposition to the Muslim Mass Contact Campaign was almost as vehement. Moonje claimed it would result in the Congress being “metamorphosed into a Muslim League.”⁶⁰ The Mahasabhites coupled denunciation of the Congress’ attempts to rally the Muslim masses with rhetorical broadsides against the UP Congress Ministry of Govind Pant. Not only had the Congress failed to protect Hindus from violence it was “inciting the laborers and the kisans [peasants] to ... class war” and “ruining” the capitalists, *zamindars* and middle classes with tenant and labor legislation and increased taxes.⁶¹

B.R. Tomlinson has shown that in the wake of the 1937 elections and especially after Congress accepted office, there was a dramatic increase in Congress membership. His point is well taken. Following the elections and especially once it had accepted office many gravitated to the Congress as the new center of provincial governmental power and patronage; local Congress official meanwhile were anxious for supporters so as to give them leverage in inner-party power struggles. I contend, however, that Tomlinson overstates his argument when he claims that the Hindu elite now focussed exclusively on the Congress, that the Congress “became the whole political environment” with “the full range of politics ... expressed through its institutions and within its membership.”⁶² Not

⁵⁸ On the Muslim mass contact campaign, see Mushirul Hasan, Ch. 7 “The Muslim Mass Contacts Campaign: Analysis of a Strategy of Political Mobilization,” *India’s Partition: Process, Strategy and Mobilization*, ed. Mushirul Hasan (Delhi: OUP, 1993) 133-159.

⁵⁹ *Towards Freedom 1937*, 1036.

⁶⁰ As cited in Ramji Lal, 61.

⁶¹ *Hindu Outlook*, 26 April and 17 May, 1939.

⁶² B.R. Tomlinson, 85-86.

all sections of India's indigenous, Hindu elite were reconciled to Congress dominance. A minority, but one with wealth and manifold political connections, grew more strident in its opposition and would constitute an important base of support for the extreme Hindu communal politics preached and practiced by Savarkar. In the case of UP, many of the politically active landlords, as well as some businessmen, emerged as important figures in the Mahasabha in the last decade of British rule. This did not happen all at once, nor without factional squabbles, but happen it did. And like Parmanand before him, Savarkar allied with those among them who were the most intransigent in opposing socio-economic reform because they shared his deep antipathy for the Congress.

III: Savarkar and the Essentials of *Hindutva*

Democratic Swaraj Party leader and Hindu Mahasabhite fellow-traveler Jamnadas Mehta insisted that all remaining restrictions on V.D. Savarkar's movements and political activities be lifted as a condition of his joining the Bombay Presidency's 1937 interim ministry.⁶³ Whilst the British relented, they can hardly be accused of leniency. Arrested in 1910 and convicted of leading a nationalist-terrorist conspiracy, Savarkar spent fourteen years in prison, then a further thirteen confined under government order to his home district of Ratnagiri.

During the long years of his internment, Savarkar was forbidden from engaging in political activity. Nevertheless, his early 1920s tract *Essentials of Hindutva* was widely circulated in Hindu *sangathanist* circles in Maharashtra and he developed a close association with the Hindu Mahasabha through his two brothers, Barabaro and Dr. D. N.

⁶³ Keer, *Veer Savarkar*, 221. Keer's biography is lacking in analysis and overly sympathetic to its subject and his Hindu nationalist ideology. It does, however, provide much useful information about Savarkar's life and political career.

Savarkar.⁶⁴ At Savarkar's instigation, Babarao Savarkar organized a Ratnagiri Hindu Sabha in 1924 and his other brother soon became active in the Hindu Sabha in the Dardar district of Bombay City.⁶⁵ Congress leader M.R. Jayakar petitioned the Bombay government to permit V.D. Savarkar to attend the founding conference of the Bombay Presidency Hindu Sabha in 1925, but the request was denied.⁶⁶ *Essentials of Hindutva* made such a strong impression on K.B. Hedgewar that he visited Ratnagiri to consult with Savarkar before launching the RSS. Savarkar's elder brother, Babaro, became a significant figure in the RSS. He is reputed to have been among the five founding RSS members and in 1931 he merged the fledgling Mahasabha youth movement that he had organized, the Tarun Hindu Sabha, into the RSS.⁶⁷ Meanwhile, the future Mahasabha President focussed his public activities on promoting Hindu *sangathan*. An avowed atheist, he nonetheless founded a temple open to Untouchables and lent support to Dr. Ambedkar's temple-entry campaign.⁶⁸ Savarkar's zeal for eliminating ritual caste barriers—he was oblivious to the Untouchable's socio-economic plight—was criticised by some Mahasabhites. In a 1936 letter Padamraj Jain, a national Mahasabha office-holder and RSS patron, complained to Savarkar that “the present trend of your writings is adding more fuel to the fire which is being burnt by ... unscrupulous and over enthusiastic so-called reformers ...”⁶⁹

Notwithstanding Savarkar's strong Hindu *sangathanist* credentials and connections, his quick accession to Mahasabha presidency was in part due to a lack of compelling

⁶⁴ V.D. Savarkar, “Essentials of Hindutva,” *Samagra Savarkar Wangmaya—Writings of Swatantrya Veer V.D. Savarkar*, V. 6 (Poona: Maharashtra Prantik Hindusabha, 1964) 1-91.

⁶⁵ Keer, 167.

⁶⁶ Jayakar Papers, File 435, Items 73 and 76.

⁶⁷ Basu, Tapan et al, *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags: A Critique of the Hindu Right* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993) 16 and 23; Keer, 171.

⁶⁸ Keer, 182-189.

⁶⁹ Padamraj Jain to Savarkar, 19 December 1936, Savarkar Papers, NMML Microfilm Roll 3.

alternatives. The Mahasabha in 1937 was disorganized and dispirited. Complained the aforementioned Padmaraj Jain:

I am sorry to remark that the whole Hindu Mahasabha is a muddle. Nothing is being done regularly. ... [M]embers of our [Working] Committee are taking part in anti-Hindu Sabha movement and going to Congress functions where the Hindu Sabha organization is being criticized and abused ...⁷⁰

Savarkar's most important contribution to the Mahasabha's development as a political party was to infuse it with his Hindu supremacist *Hindutva* ideology. Noxious as was Savarkar's doctrine, it was clear, had a certain logical consistency, and provided the Mahasabha with a fully-formed definition of a Hindu political identity and unique mission. Savarkar first defined the essentials of *Hindutva*—that is his definition of a Hindu nation and polity—in his 1920's tract of the same name. As part of his attempt to transform the Mahasabha into a Hindu nationalist political party, Savarkar spelt out the principles of *Hindutva* in catechistic style at the first three annual sessions of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha over which he presided.

The summary of Savarkar's doctrine that follows is drawn principally from the presidential addresses that he gave at Allahabad, Nagpur, and Calcutta in successive Decembers from 1937 to 1939 and this for three reasons: the addresses had the greater impact on the Mahasabha; they outline an even more radical variant of *Hindutva*; the scholarly discussion of Savarkar's doctrine has focussed almost exclusively on his earlier pamphlet.⁷¹

For Savarkar, the term *Hindutva*, which can be roughly translated as Hinduness denoted a "Hindu polity," the polity of the "Hindu nation." It was a much broader and more

⁷⁰ Padamraj Jain to Savarkar, 6 October 1937, Savarkar Papers, NMML Microfilm Roll 3.

⁷¹ See for example Gyanendra Pandey, "Which of Us are Hindus?" *Hindus and Others: The Question of Identity in India Today*, G. Pandey, ed. (New Delhi: Viking, 1993).

comprehensive term than Hinduism, for the latter referred only to the religious beliefs of Hindus, to only one aspect of Hindu culture and history.⁷²

Savarkar's doctrine has three interconnected, core tenets:

*"We Hindus are a Nation by ourselves." India's Hindus—by virtue of their reverence for India as their holyland, racial affinity or "blood brotherhood," common culture, and common history—constitute a nation and that nation—Hindusthan—is contiguous with the Indian subcontinent.⁷³ "It is absurd to call us a community in India. The Germans are the nation in Germany and the Jews a community. ... the Hindus are the nation in Hindusthan, and the Moslem minority a community."⁷⁴

*Only those for whom India is both their fatherland and holyland belong to the Hindu nation.⁷⁵

*Muslims, Christians and others who adhere to a faith of non-Indian origin constitute minority communities alien, if not hostile, to the nation. Such minority communities should be accorded citizenship rights only to the extent that they accept that the primary mission of the state must be to provide Hindus and the Hindu nation "the freedom which would enable them to grow to their full height."⁷⁶

As the above summary indicates, reverence for India as one's holyland was, for Savarkar, a fundamental element of Hindu nationality—fundamental because it served as a boundary to delineate who was part and who was excluded from the nation. His concept of holyland, however, was utterly devoid of positive religious content. An atheist or agnostic

⁷² V.D. Savarkar, *Hindu Rashtra*, 78.

⁷³ *Hindu Rashtra*, 11-12, 52, and 78-80. Savarkar gives much more importance to Hindus' racial unity in his "Essentials of Hindutva." See 55- 58.

⁷⁴ *Hindu Rashtra*, 52.

⁷⁵ *Hindu Rashtra*, 77.

⁷⁶ *Hindu Rashtra*, 16

who considered India sacred in secular nationalist terms, that is as the land of his forefathers and the Hindu nation, fulfilled Savarkar's definition as he himself explained.⁷⁷ On the other hand, those who revered India as their fatherland and cultural homeland but were tied by family, tradition, and the census to a religious community of non-Indian origin fell outside the Hindu nation.

Savarkar's definition of who makes up the Hindu nation incorporated one of the principal tenets of the Hindu Mahasabha's pre-1937 program—all who could be classified as adherents of a faith indigenous to India should be considered as Hindus for political purposes. But Savarkar criticized that definition as imprecise, for being more that of a religious than a political body. A Hindu political identity, Savarkar insisted, had to rigorously distinguish between those who merely adhered to one of the faiths of Hinduism—e.g. Buddhists in Japan—and those who were Hindus in a political sense. Those who made up the Hindu nation were doubly bound to India, as it was both their holyland and their fatherland.⁷⁸ By the same token, India's Muslims and Christians, whilst they might be indistinguishable from Hindus from the standpoint of language, ethnicity, custom and history, could not belong to the nation for they had a divided allegiance.⁷⁹

Savarkar subscribed to Spencerian and social-darwinist notions of nations as organic beings that were inevitably pitted against one another in a struggle for the collective survival of the fittest.⁸⁰ Hindus, held Savarkar, had the right, nay duty, to assure their national survival and to that end should extend political rights to non-Hindus only "provided

⁷⁷ V.D. Savarkar, "Essentials of Hindutva," 83.

⁷⁸ *Hindu Rashtra*, 7-10, 14-15 and 78-79.

⁷⁹ *Hindu Rashtra*, 14-15

⁸⁰ E.g. *Hindu Rashtra*, 52, 54, 79, and 88.

they avow and owe an exclusive and devoted allegiance to the Hindusthani state.”⁸¹ Only in Travancore (Kerala), claimed Savarkar, did the Christian minority “seem to cherish some political design against the Hindu state and it is only there that we shall have to treat them with some political distrust by not allowing them too much latitude in the state affairs and offices ...”⁸² The Muslims, by contrast, would have to be zealously watched for “at least a century to come” for they were a potential “anti-national minority,” “a constant danger threatening internal peace.”⁸³

The History of Canada, of Palestine, of the movement of the young Turks will show you that in every state where two or more such conflicting elements as the Hindus and Moslems happen to exist as constituents, the wiser of them has to keep its exclusive organisation intact, strong and watchful to defeat any attempt at the betrayal or the capture of the national State by the opposite party; especially so if that party has extraterritorial affinities.⁸⁴

In the *Essentials of Hindutva*, Savarkar defined the Hindu nation as above—using the very same formula to cast the Muslims outside the nation while appropriating the tribal peoples and Depressed Classes to the Hindu fold.⁸⁵ But in the 1920s he did not designate the Muslims an “anti-national minority,” nor prescribe that they be watched “with the greatest distrust possible” for a hundred or more years.⁸⁶ A second difference, is that in his presidential addresses Savarkar repeatedly and explicitly attacked the territorial nationalism of the Congress.

[L]et us Hindu Sanghatanists first correct the original mistake, the original political sin which our Hindu Congressites unwittingly committed at the beginning of the Indian National Congress and are persistently committing still of running after the mirage of a territorial Indian nation and of seeking

⁸¹ *Hindu Rashtra*, 94.

⁸² *Hindu Rashtra*, 56.

⁸³ *Hindu Rashtra*, 89.

⁸⁴ *Hindu Rashtra*, 89.

⁸⁵ The key passages in “The Essentials of Hindutva” regarding the definition of a Hindu nation or nationality are found on pages 64-66 and 73-75.

⁸⁶ *Hindu Rashtra*, 57 and 96.

to kill as an impediment in that fruitless pursuit the lifegrowth of an organic Hindu nation.⁸⁷

In keeping with this attack on composite Indian nationalism, Savarkar in his addresses emphasized that the ideals championed respectively by the Congress and the Hindu nationalists were not just different, but opposed.

[G]eographical independence or Swarjya of India does not mean the independence of the Hindu nation—nay, may at times prove a positive curse to their race ...

To the Hindus independence of Hindusthan can only be worth having if that ensures their *Hindutva*—their religious, racial and cultural identity.⁸⁸

Savarkar's *Hindutva* doctrine took the communal politics practised by the Mahasabha since its revival in 1922 to their logical conclusion, incorporating many traditional Mahasabha arguments and claims. Leading Mahasabhites had long argued that the Muslims had a divided allegiance and that Hindus had a greater stake in India than any other community since the Hindu faith was centered in India. Mahasabha leaders had frequently said that the only *swaraj* that would be worth winning would be a *swaraj* in which Hindu interests were secured. Nevertheless, the adoption of *Hindutva* entailed a redefinition of the Hindu Mahasabha's mission. No longer did the Mahasabha make a pretence of being a religious socio-cultural organization. It was the political expression of the Hindu nation, the Hindu "polity" in embryo. Its concern was not Hindu virtue, but the Hindu nation:

The Hindu Mahasabha is not a Hindu Mission ... but a Hindu National Mahasabha. ... The Hindu Mahasabha identifies itself with the National life of Hindudom in all its entirety, in all its social, economical, cultural and above all political aspects and is pledged to protect and promote all that contributes to the freedom, strength and glory of the Hindu Nation;⁸⁹

⁸⁷ *Hindu Rashtra*, 52.

⁸⁸ *Hindu Rashtra*, 16-17.

⁸⁹ *Hindu Rashtra*, 87-88. See also 10-11.

In his 1946 book *Pakistan or Partition of India*, the Untouchable leader and scholar Dr. Ambedkar, charged that Savarkar had propounded a Hindu version of the “two-nation” theory well before the Muslim League adopted the Pakistan Demand.⁹⁰ This claim has since been repeated by others.⁹¹ In his 1937 Ahmedabad address Savarkar did say “there are two antagonistic nations living side by side in India.”⁹² But this was from the standpoint of emphasizing the impossibility of a composite Indian nationalism. The Muslims were alien to the Hindu/Indian nation, if not an “enemy people.” Moreover, he always insisted on the indivisibility of India and on the Hindu nation’s proprietary right to the whole subcontinent. That said, it is not necessary to strain at Savarkar’s words to prove that the Muslim and Hindu communalists were intrinsically bound to one another. Partition and civil war flowed logically from the Hindu communalists’ exclusion of the Muslims from the Indian nation, from the Mahasabha’s proclamation that the one-quarter of India’s population that was Muslim should be relegated to pariah-like status, just as it did from the League claim that the Muslims of South Asia constituted a nation unto themselves and could not and would not accept incorporation into an alien Hindu/Indian state.

IV: The Political and Organizational Consolidation of the Mahasabha

In keeping with the program outlined in his presidential addresses, Savarkar worked to transform the Mahasabha into a political party. Although plagued by ill-health, he toured widely, mounting what his acolytes hailed as “whirlwind propaganda.”⁹³

⁹⁰ B.R. Ambedkar, *Pakistan or Partition of India* (Bombay: Thacker, 1946), 131.

⁹¹ M. Mujeeb, “The Partition of India in Retrospect,” C.H. Philips and Wainwright, eds., *The Partition of India. Policies and Perspectives 1935-1947* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970) 406-414; Ramji Lal, *Political India, 1935-1942. Anatomy of Indian Politics* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1986) 61 and 83.

⁹² V.D. Savarkar, *Hindu Rashtra*, 24. Savarkar also told the 1939 Mahasabha session the “refusal of the Indian Moslems to merge in a common National unit leaves the Hindus negatively too, as a Nation by themselves (81).”

⁹³ Eg. A.S. Bhide, ed., *Veer Savarkar’s “Whirlwind Propaganda” (Statements, Messages & Extracts from*

Savarkar's reputation as a nationalist-terrorist added pungency to his torrent of anti-Muslim threats.

When we will be in a position to retaliate ... and do retaliate the Moslems will come to their senses in a day. ... Knowing that every attempt to tyrannize the Hindus is sure to recoil on themselves and react for the worse on Muslim interests in all India—the Moslems will learn to behave as good boys and it is then they who will be anxious to open unity talks ... knowing that they are in a hopeless minority in India ...⁹⁴

It was not new for Mahasabha leaders to make speeches laden with threats of violence. In his maiden address as Mahasabha President in 1927, B.S. Moonje had urged the Hindus of Bengal to develop a cult of the *lathi* and put “down the mischievously aggressive mass hooliganism of the Muslims.”⁹⁵ Still in the late 1930s, Mahasabha rhetoric became more belligerent and chilling. “Make this address your *Mein Kampf*. Make Savarkar your Fuehrer,” the Mahasabha president implored delegates at its 1937 annual session. “And in no time your nation will rise to the pinnacles of glory.”⁹⁶

This was no stray remark. In the years preceding the outbreak of the Second World War, Mahasabhaite leaders routinely praised Germany's “national revival” under Hitler and the Nazis and invoked their treatment of the Jews as a warning to India's Muslims. The Third All-India Hindu Youth Conference, held in Nagpur in conjunction with the Mahasabha session in December 1938, passed a resolution titled “Muslims to be Treated Like Jews.”⁹⁷ By then the Nazi regime had stripped Jews of their citizenship, forbidden them from marrying other Germans and otherwise severely restricted their civil and economic rights. Just weeks before the Hindu Youth Conference, the Nazis mounted the *Kristallnacht*

the President's Diary of his Propagandistic Tours & Interviews, from Dec. 1937 to Oct. 1941. (Bombay: A.S. Bhide, 1941.)

⁹⁴ *Hindu Rashtra*, 64.

⁹⁵ “Extracts from Moonje's Presidential Address to the 1927 Patna Session,” *Moonje Commemoration Volume*, 130.

⁹⁶ *Hindu Outlook*, 11 January 1939.

⁹⁷ *Hindu Outlook*, 25 January 1939.

pogrom. The same Mahasabha youth conference congratulated a Hindu youth for having attempted to murder a government official who had ordered the release of a Muslim implicated in attacks on Hindus.⁹⁸

Later in this chapter we will consider the connection between the Mahasabha's promotion of communal violence and militarism and the affinity that many of the Hindu nationalists felt for European fascism.

What is important to emphasize here is that there was usually an anti-Congress edge to the Mahasabhites' invective against the Muslims and condemnations of the admittedly often communally-tinged, if not motivated, actions of the ministries in the Muslim-majority provinces. Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to say that in the late 1930s the Congress almost replaced the Muslims and the Muslim League as the principal target of Mahasabha vilification. Savarkar accused the Congress of offering blank cheques to the Muslims, while telling the Hindus, "Get looted but don't report, get stabbed but don't shriek.." ⁹⁹ Needless to say, the Mahasabhites opposed any and all Congress efforts to bridge the communal divide, whether from below through the Muslim Mass Contact Campaign or above (the 1938 Gandhi-Jinnah talks).

The Mahasabha fulminated against the Congress ministries that held office between 1937 and 1939, especially the UP Ministry, accusing them of favoring Muslims and labeling the Congress' program of moderate, socio-economic reform "communistic." G.V. Ketkar, the effective leader of the Poona Tilakites after 1936, claimed in a 1941 review of the history of the Mahasabha that "after the actual experience of the Congress

⁹⁸ *Hindu Outlook*, 25 January 1939.

⁹⁹ Savarkar, *Hindu Sangathan*, 46.

ministries in several provinces and especially UP, the [Mahasabha's] breaking away from the Congress" was complete.¹⁰⁰

The *Hindu Outlook*, the *Mahratta* and other pro-Mahasabha newspapers pointed to an upsurge in communal riots in the Congress-governed provinces as proof that the Congress was "absolutely incapable of protecting Hindu life and property."¹⁰¹ Imitating the Muslim League, which had established a committee to gather evidence of the oppression of Muslims under Congress rule, the UP Provincial Hindu Sabha named Maheshwar Dayal Seth, the Raja of Kotra, to lead an inquiry into the Congress' alleged failure to protect Hindus during a spate of communal riots in February-March 1939.¹⁰² And when the Pant Ministry, with a view to restoring communal peace, forbade certain Hindu religious processions, the Mahasabhites accused it of suppressing Hindu rights to an extent "unimaginable even in the worst days of the bureaucracy."¹⁰³ On the floor of the UP Assembly, Srivastava repeated wild, Mahasabha-circulated rumours.¹⁰⁴

But when the Mahasabhites deplored the breakdown of law and order in UP, they were referring not just to communal rioting. The Congress ministry, or so claimed the Mahasabhites, has "thrown the whole of society out of gear" by encouraging workers and peasants to organize and implementing tenant and other reform legislation. Whereas J. Nehru criticized the Congress ministries for the modesty of their reforms—they "are tending to become counter-revolutionary," he wrote in November 1937—the Mahasabha denounced them for fomenting class war.

¹⁰⁰ *IAR*, 1941, 1: 278.

¹⁰¹ *Hindu Outlook*, 19 April 1939.

¹⁰² Salil Misra, 306-07.

¹⁰³ *Hindu Outlook*, 8 March 1939.

¹⁰⁴ Salil Misra, 273.

Reckless promises made by the Congress during the elections and after have been responsible for inciting the labourers and the *kisans* to this class war. ...[S]trikes were engineered and organized by Congressmen, which have resulted in tremendous losses to the industry and the country. ... In a similar way the *kisans* have been roused up against the landlords ... Not satisfied with merely ruining the capitalists and the landlords the Congress government [with its tax proposals] has now made the middle classes, which form the backbone of the community, their victims.¹⁰⁵

In a June 1939 editorial, *Hindu Outlook*, the weekly published by Parmanand, drew a balance sheet of the UP Congress Ministry so as to illustrate the differences between the Congress and the Mahasabha:

The Congress aims at the destruction of the Hindus while the Hindu Mahasabha stands to make them the rulers of this country. ... The Congress intends to set up a communistic state and disturb the peace and unity of this country with class warfare while the Hindu Mahasabha aims at the creation of a solid Hindu Empire from the Peshwar down to Cape Comorin. ... the Congress teaches the Hindus to fear the Muslims and to respect their communal demands; and we believe it is here, if there is anywhere, that the Hindu Mahasabha justifies its existence with its bold conception of "Hindu Superiority."¹⁰⁶

Support for Federation and the princes:

In December 1937, at the same session at which Savarkar became president, the Mahasabha for the first time demanded complete independence for India. This more militant, anti-British stand was belied however by its passing a resolution urging the *Raj* to expedite implementation of the Federation provisions of the 1935 India Act.¹⁰⁷ The British had crafted their plan for an All-India Federation of British India and the Native or Princely States with the aim of frustrating Indian demands for self-rule. Under Federation the hereditary rulers of India's princely states were to have the right to appoint 40% of the members of the upper chamber of the Federation's Parliament and 33% of the lower

¹⁰⁵ J. Nehru to G. Pant, 25 November 1937, *Towards Freedom 1937*, 1194; *Hindu Outlook*, 26 April 1939.

¹⁰⁶ *Hindu Outlook*, 21 June 1939.

¹⁰⁷ *IAR*, II, 1937: 420-421.

chamber's. (The states comprised about a third of the total population and two-fifths of the land masse of Britain's Indian empire.) Moreover, Federation and the coincident transfer of a small measure of increased responsibility to the Central Indian legislature were to come into force only when a large number of the princely states had signed the instrument of accession. Linlithgow made securing the princes' support for Federation a key objective of his viceroyalty, but after the Congress triumph in the 1937 elections princely opposition hardened.¹⁰⁸

In supporting Federation, the Mahasabha broke with mainstream Indian nationalist opinion and reversed the policy hitherto advocated by the Tilakites and their DSP.¹⁰⁹ The Mahasabha's pro-Federation stance was bound up with the post-1937 intensification of communal-political strife. The Mahasabhites called on the "Hindu princes" to bring their states into the All-India Federation and urged the British to press them to join because it saw Federation as a means of thwarting the schemes of their Muslim communalist opponents to create a federation of India's Muslim-majority provinces. An added bonus, as far as the Mahasabshites were concerned, was that the Federation scheme did not impose the Communal Award or indeed any system of

¹⁰⁸ The idea of federating British and Princely India had been placed on the constitution-making agenda by some of the princes themselves at the 1930 Round Table Conference. Given the great disparities in the size and wealth of the Princely States, to say nothing of the differences of rank, caste, clan and religion among the princes, it is altogether unsurprising that the princes were divided over the merits of Federation. For more on Federation scheme and its ultimate failure see Ian Copland, *The Princes of India in the Endgame of Empire, 1917-1947* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997) Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

¹⁰⁹ For example, a 23 August 1936 *Mahratta* editorial titled "Towards Federation" was unequivocal in its opposition to the Federation scheme.

Mahasabhite interest in the princely states pre-dated the late 1930s. The Mahasabha took vigorous opposition to the popular agitation in Kashmir in the early 1930s in part because of the support lent it by Muslim politicians in the Punjab and in part because the Mahasabhites felt affinity for the Hindu Dogra landowning elite that dominated the state. In response to the Kashmir events, the Mahasabha began to organize in Bhopal and Hyderabad. Nonetheless, like the Congress and indeed all of political India, Mahasabha interest in the states became much more intense in the late 1930s.

mandatory Muslim, Christian or other community representation on the participating states.

This, however, is only part of the story. The Mahasabha's endorsement of a constitutional scheme that accorded India's princes a large measure of power over British India and placed them under no obligation to provide their subjects with elementary democratic rights cannot simply be put down to the needs of the communal-political power struggle. Like the British architects of the 1935 India Act, the Mahasabhis saw the Princely Order as a counterweight to the growing power of the Congress and the left. "I believe," declared Parmanand, "that the Princes are the flesh of our flesh and the most essential part of our body politic."¹¹⁰ Savarkar was even more forthright: "Of all the factors that are likely, under the present circumstances, to contribute to the resurgence and rejuvenation of the consolidated Hindu Nation, the Hindu States constitute the most efficient one."¹¹¹

To the surprise of the British, the Mahasabhis and the leadership of the Indian National Congress, the princely states emerged in the years immediately before the Second World War as centers of dissent and popular protest. The election of the Congress ministries stimulated demands for political reform in the states. The *kisan sabha* movement and agitation by Congress Socialist Party activists also appear to have played an important role in a sudden "vast popular awakening in princely India."¹¹² At first, Gandhi and the Congress right-wing opposed associating India's premier political organization with the

¹¹⁰ *Hindu Outlook*, 15 March 1939.

¹¹¹ *Hindu Rashtra Darshan*, 131-32.

¹¹² Ian Copland, "Congress Paternalism": The 'High Command' and the Struggle for Freedom in Princely India c. 1920-1940," *South Asia*, V. 8 (1985): 127.

unrest in the states, then in the second half of 1938 they made an abrupt aboutface.¹¹³

Copland's argument that the Congress' intervention in the states was largely aimed at bringing the states' people's movement under its control and that its influence was invariably a moderating one is persuasive.¹¹⁴

This only makes the Mahasbha's reaction all the more remarkable. The Mahasabha solidarized itself with the princes, accusing the Congress of interfering in the affairs of and seeking to undermine the Hindu States. Its December 1938 session declared:

the Congress policy of coercion and interference in the internal administration of the Indian States, under the plausible slogan of responsible government, is not genuine and in as much as the Congress activities in the matter are restricted to and concentrated only in the Hindu States ... are of the nature of harassment ...¹¹⁵

As the Congress campaign gathered strength in early 1939, the Mahasabha voiced support for police action to defend the princes' autocratic rule. The states, declared a *Hindu Outlook* editorial, "can't afford ... [their] people to play the childish game of the Congress and they must put down such activities with a strong hand. ... The Princes have to see that revolutionary ideals do not enter the States and that their people develop their institutions more with orderliness than with speed."¹¹⁶

The Mahasabhites justified their opposition to the states' people's movement with the claim that the Congress was targeting only Hindu rulers. There is a measure of truth to this, but not because the Congress was beholden to the Muslims. Wary of left-wing influence in the state people's movement and fearful that the Muslim communal politicians

¹¹³ See for example Gandhi's November 1937 statement taking strong exception to an All-India Congress Committee resolution criticizing the government of Mysore for suppressing civil liberties and urging the people of British India and states to combine in the struggle for freedom. (*Towards Freedom 1937*, 1141 and 1196.)

¹¹⁴ Ian Copland, "Congress Paternalism": 129-30.

¹¹⁵ As cited in *Hindu Outlook*, 15 March 1939.

¹¹⁶ *Hindu Outlook*, 28 March 1940.

would paint any movement in a state with a Muslim-ruler as yet another step to Hindu *Raj*, the Congress leadership tried to focus all the hopes and energies of the states' peoples on a handful of agitations that it felt confident that it would have the support and organizational-strength to control. This explains why Rajkot, the tiny Gujarati state that was Gandhi's ancestral home, became a focus of the Congress campaign for democratic reform in the princely states.

The Mahsabha's claims that the state's people's movement constituted outside interference in the states echoed those of the princes and made a mockery of the Mahasabha's own claims that the entire subcontinent constituted a single Hindu nation. Even more importantly, the Mahasabhites' rhetoric about non-intervention in the states served to mask their attempts to forge a closer relationship with the princes. In this they had a double-aim: to preserve princely power so it could be deployed via Federation against their Muslim, Congress and leftist opponents; to win princely financial and other support for the Mahasabha.

In March 1939, when the Congress agitation in Jaipur was at its height, Parmanand rushed to the state, where he appeared at mass meetings in support of the ruler and discussed with *darbar* officials how to staunch the protest movement. Soon after the *darbar* gave accreditation to a Jaipur Hindu Sabha.¹¹⁷

Travancore was another state that saw a Congress-supported agitation during this period. In January 1939, its *Dewan* wrote to Savarkar to commend the Mahasabha for its support of the princes and to wish "the Sabha all success and prosperity."¹¹⁸ Somewhat later, after touring Travancore, Savarkar appealed to the *Dewan* for financial support: "It

¹¹⁷ *Hindu Outlook*, 8 March 1939.

¹¹⁸ Sir C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar to the Secretary Hindu Mahasabha office in Bombay, 12 January 1939. Savakar Papers, Microfilm Roll.

is the Hindu Maha Sabha whose bold opposition checkmated the anti-Hindu State policy of the Congress. Should not the Hindu States enable its most powerful and devoted advocate to maintain at least an [sic] well equipped office ...?¹¹⁹

The Mahasabhites were not in principle opposed to any and all reforms in the political organization of the states.¹²⁰ Their ideal would have been some form of constitutional-monarchy in which the princes retained a significant share of power. But forced to choose between popular movements from below—whether led by the Congress or not—and princely autocracy, the Mahasabha clearly came down on the side of the latter.

The Hindu Mahasabha's defence of the Hindu princes pleased the Mahasabha's landlord supporters for it was an affirmation of hereditary and aristocratic privilege. It accorded with the interests of big industrialists such as Sir S.P. Srivastava in an even more direct sense. Following the formation of the Congress ministries, Srivastava and other industrialists shifted new investment to the Indian States, where wages and taxes were lower and labor legislation all but non-existent.¹²¹

The Expansion of the Hindu Mahasabha:

Savarkar's "whirlwind" propaganda tours did contribute to a growth in Mahasabha support, especially in his native region. In 1938-39 the Mahasabha established 24 new branches in Maharashtra and by the outbreak of the war had a presence in all of Maharashtra's urban centres.¹²² The breadth of Mahasabha support in

¹¹⁹ V.D. Savakar to Sir C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar, Savakar Papers, Microfilm Roll 24, NMML.

¹²⁰ E.g. *Hindu Outlook*, 8 March 1939.

¹²¹ Markovits, 165; Robin Moore, "Paul Scott and the Partition of India," *India's Partition Preludes and Legacies*, Ramkant Rajan Mahan, ed. (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1998) 107.

¹²² Nandini Gondhalekar and Sanjoy Bhattacharya, "The All India Hindu Mahasabha and the End of British Rule in India, 1939-1947," *Social Scientist* 27 (1999) n. 35, 69.

Maharashtra was not matched, however, by social depth. Its support was heavily concentrated among Brahmins, especially Chitpavan Brahmins.

In the 18th century, the Chitpavan Brahmins had ensconced themselves at the apex of Maharashtran society by acting as the political and bureaucratic elite of an expanding complex of Maratha kingdoms. Following the British conquest, they managed to preserve much of their power by taking to English education and making a niche in the professions and the lower and middle echelons of the *Raj*'s administrative institutions. Subsequently Maratha Brahmins, particularly the Chitpavans, were in the forefront of the development of Indian nationalism in the Bombay Presidency.¹²³ But by World War One, English education had spread to other social groups while the development of capitalism was eroding traditional caste hierarchies. Intensified competition for public service jobs coincided with challenges to Brahmin caste privileges and demands for an end to their quasi-monopoly in the leadership of the provincial Congress and the *Raj*'s representative institutions. In the 1920s and 1930s, both a powerful Non-Brahmin movement and a distinct anti-untouchability movement centered on the Mahars arose in Maharashtra. Meanwhile, the cities of Bombay and, to a lesser extent, Nagpur emerged as centers of labor radicalism.

Savarkar's fiery rhetoric of Hindu self-assertion, with its frequent references to the glories of the Maratha empire and silence on socio-economic questions, resonated with the wealthier elements among the Maratha Brahmins, like L.B. Bhopatkar, who feared for their property. It also struck a chord among less well-off layers like the future assassins of Gandhi, Godse and Apte, who in the Muslim enemy had a target on which to

¹²³ Maureen Patterson, "Changing Patterns of Occupations Among Chitpavan Brahmins," *IEHSR*, 7 (1970): 375-396.

vent their frustrations and anxieties. Both groups feared the democratizing and egalitarian thrust of contemporary Indian politics. Explaining the growth of Hindu nationalism in Maharashtra, a Congress leader observed, "The older politicians [i.e. the Tilakites] are engaged in a life and death struggle and this seems their final effort at re-establishing their hold on young India. ... The growing democratization of the Congress is driving out a small portion of the sophisticated middle classes."¹²⁴

An important factor in the Mahasabha's expansion in Maharashtra was its participation in a struggle for the civic and religious rights of Hindus in the princely state of Hyderabad—the 1939 Hyderabad *satyagraha*. First under the guise of the Civil Liberties Union of Poona and then in its own name, the Mahasabha organized bands of civil resisters to enter Hyderabad. Whilst Savarkar strove to make it a national campaign, the Hyderabad agitation had particular resonance in Maharashtra because the state's north-western districts were Marathi-speaking. The vast majority of the roughly four thousand Mahasabha supporters arrested for breaking Hyderabad's laws hailed from Maharashtra.¹²⁵

The Hyderabad agitation was initiated by the state's Arya Samajists to protest governmental discrimination against Hindus. There is much evidence to show that Hyderabad's Muslim ruler, the Nizam, did discriminate in favor of his co-religionists, but this only pointed to the autocratic, semi-feudal character of his regime, which held the mass of Hyderabad's population, Hindu and Muslim, in abject poverty.¹²⁶ If Savarkar was enthusiastic about the Hyderabad campaign, it was not only because the Arya Samaj

¹²⁴ Shankar Rao Deo to Subhas Chandra Bose, 6 November 1938, *Paradoxes of Partition*, V. 1, 503.

¹²⁵ *Hindu Outlook*, 3 and 31 May, 1939.

¹²⁶ Ian Copland, "'Communalism' in Princely India: The Case of Hyderabad, 1930-1940," *MAS*, 22 (1988), 787. Copland's article discusses the Mahasabha's intervention in Hyderabad at some length.

limited its agitation to the question of Hindus' rights, thus allowing it to be cast in communal terms. The Hyderabad movement provided the Mahasabha with an opportunity to mount a counterblast to the Congress' Native States' Peoples' movement.

When the Congress withdrew its support for the Hyderabad campaign because it feared that it was veering in a communal direction, Savarkar convinced its Arya Samaj leaders to defy the express wishes of Gandhi and persist with civil disobedience. Ultimately, the Nizam made some minor concessions relating to the Arya Samaj's demands for freedom of religious worship and the agitation was suspended. Its importance to this study is that the Hyderabad *satyagraha* proved to be the largest civil resistance campaign that the Mahasabha ever mounted and came to be much celebrated in Mahasabha lore.¹²⁷ It is, therefore, ironic that the campaign contributed to the Mahasabha's estrangement from the RSS. Savarkar was much angered when RSS supremo Hedgewar permitted only a relatively small number of RSS cadres to participate in the Hyderabad campaign and only on an individual basis. Moreover, as Savarkar himself conceded, it was Arya Samaj, not the Mahasabha, that mobilized the majority of the resisters and bore the brunt of the Nizam's repression.¹²⁸

The re-launching of the Bengal Hindu Sabha was the other major success that the Mahasabha scored in the first years of Savarkar's presidency. In early 1939, the Mahasabha held its first provincial conference in Bengal in six years.¹²⁹ Soon after the rival provincial Hindu Sabhas that had existed since 1936 merged. Their reunification was facilitated by the entry into the Mahasabha or renewed interest in it on the part of

¹²⁷ The Mahasabha published a more than 250-page account of its role in the Hyderabad agitation, S.R. Date, *Bhaganagar Struggle: A Brief History of the Movement led by Hindu Maha Sabha in Hyderabad State in 1938-39* (Poona: S.R. Date, c. 1939).

¹²⁸ V.D. Savarkar, *Hindu Rashtra*, 69.

¹²⁹ Ashutosh Lahiri to V.D. Savarkar, 16 January 1939, Savarkar Papers, Microfilm Roll 3, NMML.

prominent leaders of the Bengali *bhadralok*, including the Maharaja of Mymensingh and Shyama Prasad Mookerjee. As its new president, the merged Bengal Hindu Sabha chose Sir M.N. Mukherji, a retired judge and former Law Member of the Viceroy's Council. At the end of 1939 the All-India Hindu Mahasabha held its annual session in Bengal, India's most populous province, for the first time in a decade and a half. The following spring the Bengal Hindu Sabha contested the Calcutta Municipal Corporation elections, winning 16 of the 33 seats that it contested despite the collapse of an electoral pact with Subhas Chandra Bose's dissident Congress faction.¹³⁰ Threatened by Muslim communal-political assertion and growing peasant radicalism, including widespread demands for *zamindari* abolition, a section of Bengal's elite orchestrated the Mahasabha's revival in the hopes of making it the instrument of a *bhadralok* counter-offensive.

Hindu supremacism and European fascism:

Earlier I drew attention to the fact that the Mahasabha was never a very cohesive organization, let alone a cadre party. While valid, this assessment should not cause us to dismiss the significance of the ideological and political affinities many Mahasabha leaders felt for European fascism.

The principal ideologues of Hindu nationalism drew on right-wing European thought in transforming the notion of Hindu Superiority into a political program. (Savarkar, to give one example, was heavily influenced by Herbert Spencer and other social darwinists.)¹³¹ The rise of European fascist parties in the Europe of the 1920s and 1930s appears to have further radicalized them. In the years immediately prior to World

¹³⁰ S.P. Mookerjee *Leaves from a Diary* (Calcutta: OUP, 1993) 29-34; *Mahratta*, 19 January 1940; Subhas Chandra Bose, *Netaji: Collected Works Vol. 10*, ed. Sisir Kumar Bose and Sugata Bose (Calcutta: Netaji Research Bureau, 1998) 88-90 and 98-100.

¹³¹ Chetan Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths*, (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 81-82.

War II, Savarkar and other Mahasabha leaders made no secret of their belief that fascism had led to Italy's and Germany's national revival and commended the fascist powers as examples for Hindus to follow. "The very fact," declared Savarkar in a November 1938 address, "that Germany or Italy has so wonderfully recovered and grown so powerful ... at the touch of the Nazi or fascist magical wand is enough to prove that those political ... [doctrines] were the most congenial tonics ..."¹³²

Needless to say, there was a great gap between late colonial India and inter-war Europe. But the Hindu nationalists' affinity for fascism was rooted in like beliefs—extreme nationalism and anxiety for "national unity," claims of cultural superiority, the exaltation of militarism as the ultimate test of a nation's strength, and anti-communism. Savarkar pointed to the rise of German military and geo-political power in the late 1930s and the collapse of so-called treaty nations, like Czechoslovakia, as proof of the superiority of ethnic or organic nationalism and the impossibility of trying to develop a composite Indian nationalism.¹³³

In some of their actions, the Mahasabhites quite consciously emulated European fascists. Moonje toured Italy in 1932, visiting various fascist youth institutions along with other sites more commonly patronized by tourists. The highlight of his trip was an interview with the dictator Mussolini. While Moonje had long been a proponent of martial training for Hindus and taken a keen interest in military affairs, his visit to Italy gave new urgency to his efforts to foster the "military regeneration" of Hindu society. On

¹³² "Press Note Issued by the Hindu Mahasabha Office, Bombay Branch," Jayakar Papers, File 65.

Much or all of Savarkar's speech was reproduced in Berlin's largest circulation daily, according to *Hindu Outlook*, 18 January 1939.

¹³³ Savarkar, *Hindu Rahtra Darshan*, 84-88.

his return to India he introduced the RSS to organizational practices that he had witnessed in Italy.¹³⁴

It was Hitler and his treatment of the “anti-national Jewish community” that most impressed the Hindu nationalists. Germany, they claimed, was a country that had known how to solve its minorities problem. Replying to a warning from Muslim League President M.A. Jinnah that India’s Muslims might one day imitate the Sudeten Germans and appeal for intervention by their Muslim brethren outside India, Savarkar declared:

To that threat I retort that our friends in the Muslim League ... should remember that the illustration cuts both ways. If ... [the Muslims] grow stronger they can play the part of the Sudeten Germans alright. But if we Hindus in India grow stronger, in time these Muslim friends of the League type will have to play the part of the German Jews instead.¹³⁵

Scholars have frequently noted that in his 1938 tract *We, Or Our nationhood Defined*, the soon to be RSS supreme leader, M.S. Golwalkar, called the national pride fostered by the Nazi regime and its “purging ... of the semitic races,” “a good lesson for us in Hindusthan to learn and profit by.”¹³⁶ But praise for Hitler and fascism was by no means a peculiarity of Hindu nationalist circles in Maharashtra. Parmanand’s *Hindu Outlook* printed anti-semitic propaganda, hailed Germany’s geo-political advances up until September 1939, and celebrated Franco’s triumph.¹³⁷ In August 1941, Parmanand published an explanation of his “theory of nationality” in which he argued that it was “Herr Hitler, the commoner” who “ultimately found out the solution” to forging a vibrant nation from disparate peoples and in the face of the “anti-national propaganda of

¹³⁴ Marzia Casolari, *The Italian Connection—Hindutva’s foreign tie-up in the 1930s: Archival evidence* (New Delhi: Footnotes, 2000).

¹³⁵ *Hindu Outlook*, 11 and 25 January and 8 March 1939.

¹³⁶ As cited in Basu et al, *Khaki Shorts*, 26.

¹³⁷ *Hindu Outlook*, 25 January 1939.

socialism.” Parmanand’s article, a new introduction to his 1931 pamphlet *Hindu Nationalism*, regurgitated extracts from Hitler’s writings.¹³⁸

The Mahasabha’s pursuit of “military cooperation” with the *Raj* meant that after the outbreak of World War II, its leaders had to be much more circumspect in praising the fascist powers. But the enthusiasm for fascism still reverberated among Parmanand’s and Savarkar’s followers. In October 1944, Savarkar’s personal secretary penned an article in which he declared the Muslims to be the “Enemy People” of the Hindu nation and warned they might have to be placed in internment camps. Wrote Bhide, the interests of the “Hindu People and Nation” and the Muslims

are culturally, historically, economically, inimical and opposite. ...

As such, they [the Muslims] ought to be kept in internment camps, if time comes and circumstances demand, and they should thank their stars, if that time does not arrive. Otherwise, they will have to remain in internment camps until security of their good conduct is guaranteed. This is Savarkism.¹³⁹

Long after the collapse of the Thousand Year Reich, some Mahasabhites continued to express their admiration for Hitler and the Nazis. In 1949, Ganpat Rai, who had once urged M.R. Jayakar to become the Hitler of the Hindus, advocated that the Mahasabha be relaunched as a “national socialist party.”¹⁴⁰ In a 1961 speech, Savarkar compared Hitler favorably to the Congress government.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ To give but one example, Parmanand, after noting the growth of socialist sentiment among the younger generation of Congress leaders, observed, “Their ideology” is “to get rid of the idea of nation [and] to form an universal proletarian state in the country. Herr Hitler also had to face the same difficulty. He says, ‘I began to consider how an attempt might be made to master World Pestilence ... the doctrine of World view of Marxism—the question of the future that [*sic*] the German Nation lay in the destruction of Marxism.’ ” (*Hindu Outlook*, 19 August 1941).

¹³⁹ A.S. Bhide, 94-95.

¹⁴⁰ Ganpat Rai to Ashutosh Lahiry, 29 May 1949 and Ashutosh Lahiry to Ganpat Rai, 2 June 1949, HMS P-117.

¹⁴¹ Bhatt, 107.

Thus far we have said nothing about the Hindu Mahasabha's economic programme, other than to note that the Mahasabha opposed land reform and strikes. This is reflective of Mahasabha priorities. But it is significant that the economic programme Savarkar outlined in December 1939, the "National Coordination of Class Interests" resembled the corporatist doctrines of Benito Mussolini.¹⁴² Italy's fascist-corporatist state suppressed the trade unions and socialist parties, then it established joint councils of employers, fascist union officials, and government bureaucrats, to "regulate" class conflict in the "national interest."¹⁴³ Savarkar likewise said it was the state's duty to ensure that the economy is not damaged by "the selfish class interest of either the capitalists or laborites." If diminishing profits threaten the development of India's industries, the state must stand ready to impose wage reductions.

In short the claims of capital and labor will be so co-ordinated from time to time so as to enable the Nation as a whole to develop its National Industry and manufacture and make itself self-sufficient.¹⁴⁴

Savarkar stipulated that private property should in "general be held inviolate," adding that if ever the State found it necessary to expropriate a company in the interests of developing the national economy "reasonable recompense" must be provided. All strikes or lockouts that threatened the country's economic strength would be outlawed and referred to state arbitration or if that failed "quelled."¹⁴⁵

Savarkar's economic program had two other tenets. The first, protection for "national industries against foreign competition," had long been championed by the

¹⁴² V.D. Savarkar, *Hindu Sangathan: Its Ideology and Immediate Programme* (Bombay: Hindu Maha Sabha Presidential Office, 1940) 182-189.

¹⁴³ Alexander De Grand, *Italian Fascism: Its Origins and Development* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska, 1982) 80.

¹⁴⁴ Savarkar, *Hindu Sangathan*, 188.

¹⁴⁵ Savarkar, *Hindu Sangathan*, 188-89.

Indian nationalist movement. The second “Hindu *swadeshi*”—that is the boycott of goods not produced by Hindus and the exclusive patronage of Hindu-owned shops—represented an attempt to transpose to the all-India level a practice that had originated as a tactic in local communal struggles, then became a commercial weapon in the hands of hawkers, traders and shopkeepers. While the “Buy Hindu” movement had indigenous roots, there are obvious resemblances to tactics employed by European fascist movements.

* * *

V.D. Savarkar brought to the All-India Hindu Mahasabha much energy, a reputation as an indomitable opponent of British rule, and a Hindu nationalist program and ideology that distinguished it radically from its principal rival for Hindu support, the Indian National Congress. Nevertheless, the key to Savarkar's success in consolidating the Hindu Mahasabha as a right-wing, Hindu communalist alternative to the Congress and Congress nationalism lay in the dramatic intensification of social conflict in the India of the middle and late 1930s.

The 1937 elections and the growing geo-political crisis in Europe revealed that the foundations of the *Raj* were rapidly eroding. Meanwhile, a process of Depressed Class, peasant and labor assertion and politicization, traceable back to the end of World War One, was tearing ever more widely into India's traditional social fabric.

Unquestionably, the Muslims League's new found aggressiveness and the coming to power of Muslim-dominated ministries in the Punjab and Bengal caused sections of Hindus, especially from amongst the privileged layer whose incomes were tied to government largesse, to look for a robust, communal response. In the programme of

“Hindu superiority” they found articulation of both their desire for revenge and underlying insecurity.

But apprehensions about subaltern discontent and the development of professed socialist tendencies in and around the Congress proved pivotal in impelling a layer of Mahasabhites who had long been active in the Congress to support the Mahasabha's transformation into a political party. Meanwhile, the big landlords, particularly in UP, and sections of business gravitated toward the Hindu Mahasabha, believing that Hindu nationalism could provide them with a populist program on which to organize against the Congress and the left.

Savarkar, Parmanand and the other Hindu nationalist ideologues shared the apprehensions and antipathies of India's men of property toward the Congress and socialism. They sought to consolidate and widen landlord and business support by churning out anti-Congress propaganda and by promoting the Mahasabha as a counterweight to the Congress. Savarkar's claim that the Mahasabha was responsible for the petering out of the Congress' 1938-39 campaign for democratic reform in the princely states—“It is the Hindu Maha Sabha whose bold opposition checkmated the anti-Hindu State policy of the Congress”—was without foundation.¹⁴⁶ Nonetheless, the claim speaks to the nature of the Mahasabha and its ambitions. So too does its leaders' affinity for European fascism.

In short, by the late 1930s, the Mahasabha was a party of Hindu supremacism and socio-economic reaction. It promoted militarism and sought to incite communal retaliation against Muslims, advocated co-operation with the British colonial authorities and deferment of the struggle for Indian self-rule in the hopes of undermining “Muslim

¹⁴⁶ See page 90, note 119.

power,” and vehemently opposed the Congress ministries and measures aimed at curbing landlord and princely privilege and the power of capital. With the outbreak of World War II, Savarkar, Parmanand, Moonje and other Hindu nationalists would seize on the *Raj*'s desperate need for political collaborators to try to realize their ambition of forging an Anglo-Hindu alliance.

Part Two: Responsive Co-operation or the Anglo-Hindu alliance in Practice—the Hindu Mahasabha during World War II

The outbreak of the Second World War radically changed the Indian political equation. For India's colonial overlords, mobilizing India's resources to repel the military threat to Britain and the Empire now overrode all other concerns, including ensnaring the Congress in the constitutional regime erected by the 1935 India Act. In short order, Viceroy Linlithgow declared India to be at war, gave the government emergency powers to quell dissent by invoking a Defence of India Ordinance, and proclaimed the scheme for Federation suspended.

Unlike the Congress, the Hindu Mahasabha responded favorably to the British and British Indian governments' appeals for support in prosecuting the war and promises that the constitutional question would be revisited once victory was won.¹ By August 1940 Linlithgow had come to view the Mahasabha as a valued ally that merited representation on his Executive Council. But the political dynamics were such that it would take almost two years for Linlithgow's wish to be fulfilled. Just weeks before the Congress adopted its Quit India resolution, the most prominent and powerful Mahasabha leader in the United Provinces, Sir J.P. Srivastava, was named to the Viceroy's Council. With the blessing of HMS President V.D. Savarkar, Srivastava subsequently supported the colonial state's vigorous suppression of the Quit India movement. For his own part,

¹ The INC's attitude to World War II is a complex question and one that goes well beyond the purview of this dissertation. Suffice it so say, the Congress right was far from eager to abandon office and many in the Congress leadership, beginning with M.K. Gandhi and J. Nehru, were sympathetic to Britain's plight. Yet a Congress that was already fraying under pressure for a more radical stand against British rule and social inequality, could ill afford to ignore the challenge to India's aspirations for self-rule implicit in the Viceroy's unilateral declaration of war. For more on the INC and World War II, see B.R. Tomlinson, *The Indian National Congress and the Raj* and A.I. Singh, *The Origins of the Partition of India: 1936-1947* (Delhi: OUP, 1987).

the Mahasabha President implored the public not to join the Congress agitation. Later in 1942, Linlithgow returned the favor. When Savarkar's leadership of the Mahasabha came under threat from elements opposed to his vehement anti-Congress stance, Linlithgow intervened to shore it up. In 1943 Savarkar continued to provoke controversy, taking stands that conformed with British objectives and rankled even many of the Congress's rightist and Hindu communalist critics. The Mahasabha President opposed Gandhi's release from detention and advocated that the Mahasabha join forces with the Muslim League to form coalition governments in several provinces. This chapter will document the Mahasabha's close war-time relations with the British colonial regime.

Savarkar, the principal architect of the Hindu Mahasabha's war policy, portrayed the Mahasabha's support for the British Indian government as a conjunctural alliance born of the need to "militarize Hindudom." His bellicose war-time speeches were an implicit and oft-times explicit call for Hindus to prepare for a violent confrontation with India's Muslims by joining the armed forces and getting military training. Undoubtedly, Savarkar's concern with changing the communal composition of the British Indian Army was real. But Part Two will show that the Mahasabha's alliance with India's colonial rulers was not merely a pragmatic response to the opportunity that the war offered to popularize military training. The Mahasabha's "militarization policy" was the form in which Savarkar and the more extreme Hindu communalists sought to realize an ambition they had long nurtured, but which had been frustrated by the Congress—supplanting the alliance between the British and the Muslim communalist politicians with an "Anglo-Hindu" one. They would fail in this, but not for want of trying. In the darkest hour of his

viceroyalty in August 1942, Linlithgow did raise the possibility of constructing an “Indianized” government around the Hindu Mahasabha, only to dismiss the idea as folly.

During the Second World War, the Mahasabha arguably reached the apex of its influence and the height of its popular support. A pivotal factor in the Mahasabha’s growth was the support that it received from the colonial regime. As we have seen, in the 1937 elections the Mahasabha was routed, yet in 1940 the British government dubbed the Mahasabha India’s “third great” political organization. The Mahasabha also benefited indirectly from war-time restrictions on, and later the outright suppression of, Congress activity. Still, the Mahasabha’s Hindu supremacist rhetoric and conservative socio-economic program did garner considerable support among the urban professional and trader classes and among India’s indigenous, landed- and business-elite. In Bengal, where there was widespread resentment at Bengal’s feeble say in Congress policy and apprehension over the rise of Muslim communal-political power, the Mahasabha emerged as a serious competitor for *bhadralok* support. Far from being a political “untouchable,” the communalist Mahasabha was treated with interest and sympathy by many “moderates” at least in the opening years of the war. For a time, it looked as if Savarkar would be successful in his attempt to use the Non-Party Conference, an amorphous grouping of “moderate” leaders, to boost the Mahasabha’s claim to be the third force in Indian politics. As we shall document in Chapter 5 several dissident Congressmen sought to use the Mahasabha to help promote a reconciliation between the Congress and the British following the Quit India confrontation. More enduring was the support that the Mahasabha received from India’s landlord and princely orders. In the United Provinces, in particular, the most zealous Hindu *taluqdars* and *zamindars* made

the Mahasabha their principal political vehicle. Support from the *durbars* of princely India was more discrete and conditional, but played a significant role in the Mahasabha's emergence as an all-India force.

In becoming a locus for Hindu communal, "moderate," landlord and princely politics, the Mahasabha half-realized the longstanding ambition of British colonial strategists and erstwhile Congressmen like M.R. Jayakar to create a popular, all-India, right-wing alternative to the Congress. Half-realized, because in an India where the subaltern classes were becoming increasingly assertive and politically self-conscious, the Mahasabha's identification with elite interests mitigated against its attempts to rally mass support.

A central theme of Part Two is the development of serious divisions within the Mahasabha leadership over its relations with the British colonial regime, the Congress and the Muslim League in the wake of the Quit India rebellion. By 1943-44 these divisions would seriously destabilize the Mahasabha. These divisions arose not only because of an influx of new members not fully indoctrinated in Hindu nationalist ideology, but because the Mahasabha's very political prominence made it the object of heightened social and political pressures.

Particular attention has been paid to dissecting the maneuvers and motivations of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Sabha and its leader Shyama Prasad Mookerjee. Although he only joined the Mahasabha in 1939, Mookerjee rapidly became the Working President of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Sabha, as well as the leader of a small but influential faction in the Bengal Assembly. Savarkar's ultimate successor as Mahasabha president, Mookerjee has sometimes been called a moderate, even a constitutionalist. The account

that follows will show that while Mookerjee wanted to temper Savarkar's attacks on the Congress, he was militantly communal and a staunch defender of the privileges of the Bengali *bhadralok*.

Chapter 3: “Militarize all Hindus and Hinduize all Politics”—the Hindu Mahasabha and the British Raj, 1939-1941

This chapter focuses on the period from September 1939 to the end of 1941, that is roughly from the outbreak of war in Europe to the beginning of the Pacific War. Japan’s rapid advance through south-east Asia at the beginning of 1942 would thrust India into the center of the world war, so the preceding 28-month period constitutes, in retrospect, something of a whole. The first of this chapter’s three sections documents the attempts of the colonial regime to associate the Hindu Mahasabha with the war effort and of the Hindu Mahasabha to gain representation on the Viceroy’s Council. Next we discuss the import of the Mahasabha’s “Hindu militarization” policy. It had an unmistakable anti-Muslim thrust, but “Hindu militarization” was also a means of promoting the Mahasabha’s ties with the Raj, princes and business. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the Mahasabha’s long-drawn debate over whether to resort to direct action. The debate ended with Savarkar stipulating that direct action was permissible against Muslims, but not on constitutional questions.

I: The Mahasabha, the Colonial Regime and the Second World War

Hindu Mahasabha President V.D. Savarkar was one of 52 political leaders whom the Viceroy interviewed in the fall of 1939 in a bid to rally India’s support for the British war effort. The Mahasabhaites were quick to tout Savarkar’s inclusion in Linlithgow’s consultations as proof of the Mahasabha’s growing political influence.¹ Yet, less than a year later, Savarkar was one of just three Indian political leaders granted an advance copy of the Viceroy’s “August offer.” (The other two were the Presidents of the Congress and

¹ Indra Prakash called Savarkar’s 10 October 1939 audience with the Viceroy “a momentous chapter in Hindu history.” See Chitra Gupta, *Life of Barrister Savarkar, Revised and Brought up to date by Indra Prakash* (New Delhi: Hindu Mission Pustak Bhandar, 1939) 259.

Muslim League.)² What accounts for the dramatic rise in the colonial regime's estimate of the Mahasabha's political importance?

During the war's first year, the Mahasabha did draw new support. The INC's threats to launch a mass movement against British rule and the increasing aggressiveness of the Muslim communalists, as exemplified by the Muslim League's adoption of the Pakistan Demand, troubled and frightened many matriculated and propertied Hindus. But, Savarkar's boasts notwithstanding, the Mahasabha could hardly be said to have captured the political stage.³ What added luster to the Mahasabha in British eyes was its readiness to defy the Congress in mobilizing India behind the war effort. The Mahasabha's potential to serve as a counter-weight to the Muslim League, which under Jinnah's leadership was seeking to drive a hard-bargain for its entry into the central government, was an added benefit. Declared Linlithgow in a letter to the Secretary of State for India in September 1940, "I am very clear that they [the Mahasabhites] badly want to come in [the government] and I hope very much that we shall succeed in getting them for they have shown on the whole ... a degree of political realism which has been singularly lacking" in the Congress and Muslim League.⁴

In courting the Mahasabha, Linlithgow was under no illusion about its virulent antipathy toward Muslims. The Viceroy considered the Mahasabha "violently communal in outlook."⁵ But the British recognized that the communal divide was a bulwark of their rule. "On the positive side," reported the Secretary of State for India in a July 1940

² Linlithgow to Amery, 3 August 1940, L/P&J/8/507, India Office Library.

³ See Savarkar's address to the Mahasabha's 1940 session in Madura, *Savarkar Writings*: 406-412.

⁴ Linlithgow to Amery, 17 September 1940, L/P&J/8/507.

⁵ Linlithgow to Amery, 30 June 1940, L/P&J/8/507.

memorandum to the War Cabinet, "the estrangement between the Hindu and Muslim communities has reached serious proportions."⁶

* * *

Within days of the war's outbreak, Hindu Mahasabha leaders were proclaiming their readiness to support the British war effort and deploring the "bargaining attitude" of other parties. Privately, however, they expressed concern over the government's solicitude toward the Congress, complaining that the British habitually rewarded their enemies and spurned their friends.⁷ On 10 September 1939 the Mahasabha Working Committee affirmed that there was "ample room for whole-hearted co-operation between India and England" in prosecuting the war. It urged the colonial authorities to "make such co-operation effective" by conceding responsible government at the center, scrapping the Communal Award, and abolishing caste/communal discrimination in military recruitment (the designations of martial and non-martial races.)⁸

Savarkar, at his 9 October 1939 meeting with the Viceroy, went considerably further. According to Linlithgow's summary of their discussion, Savarkar insisted that "the old antagonism" between the British and the Hindus "was no longer necessary." While conceding that he had once adhered to "a revolutionary party," the Mahasabha President professed to have become "the most moderate of men." "Now," explained

⁶ Memorandum from Amery to the War Cabinet, "India and the War," 6 July 1940, L/P&J/8/507.

⁷ "Such an attitude," complained Ganpat Rai in a 7 September 1939 letter to M.R. Jayakar, "... exasperates and estranges the feeling of those who want to befriend" the British. Jayakar Papers, File 709 II, U. of Toronto Microfilm Box 122.

⁸ Resolution of 10 September 1939 Mahasabha Working Committee Meeting, Jayakar Papers, File 709 II, U. of Toronto Microfilm Box 122.

Savarkar, "that our interests were so closely bound together, the essential thing was for Hinduism and Great Britain to be friends . . ."⁹

The Mahasabha's pro-British war policy clashed with the aforementioned sympathy of Savarkar and other Hindu nationalists for Europe's fascist powers. Pro-Mahasabha newspapers like *Hindu Outlook* and the *Mahratta* ceased publishing articles supportive of the Axis powers' territorial claims. Leading Mahasabhites, however, continued to admire and take inspiration from fascism. "Nazism proved undeniably the saviour of Germany," Savarkar told the Mahasabha's 1940 session.¹⁰

The Mahasabhites viewed the INC's resignation of its eight provincial ministries in late October 1939 with ambivalence.¹¹ Mahasabha leaders chastized the Congress for reviving what they considered to be the futile and ruinous policy of non-cooperation, but they could not fail to recognize that as the Congress assumed a more antagonistic attitude toward the British Raj, the colonial regime became more anxious to secure the Mahasabha's collaboration. Nor were many UP Mahasabhites saddened by the departure of a Congress ministry that they held to be both "socialistic" and pro-Muslim.¹²

To underscore its eagerness to cooperate with the colonial regime and emphasize its distinctiveness from the Congress, the Mahasabha redefined its attitude toward India's political future in the last two months of 1939. At its 1937 session the Hindu Mahsabaha had simultaneously proclaimed complete independence to be its goal and endorsed the colonial authorities' scheme of Federation, which was designed to bind the princely states

⁹ India Office, Mss Eur F 125/8 1939: Linlithgow to Amery, 7 October 1939, postscript of 9 October, cited in Marzia Casolari, 33.

¹⁰ *Savarkar Writings*, 418.

¹¹ In seven provinces—UP, Bombay, Madras, the Central Provinces, Bihar, Orissa, and the N.W.F.P.—the INC's withdrawal of its ministers compelled the British to invoke Section 93, thus placing their administration in the hands of the local Governor. In Assam, an alternative ministry was formed.

¹² See preceding chapter.

more closely to British India, the better to use them as a conservative bulwark against the Congress. Linlithgow's 17 October 1939 announcement that Federation was being abandoned (a sop to the Muslim League and the princes), thus eliminated an important policy distinction between the Mahasabha and the Congress. The Mahasabha responded by hastening to restore an intermediate stage to its scheme for Indian independence. In early November 1939, the Working Committee announced—and this position was subsequently endorsed by the organization's December 1939 annual session—that the Mahasabha was ready to support Dominion status as an interim step, of undefined length, toward full independence. By urging that Dominion status be conferred on India “no later than at the war's end,” the Mahasabha also signaled its acceptance of the British position that no fundamental change could be made to India's constitution during the war.

To invest much importance in the distinction between Dominion status and independence may strike today's reader as constitutional hair-splitting. After all, didn't the Congress itself accept Dominion status in 1947 when negotiating the transfer of power? Obscured by such an argument is the extent to which the import of constitutional formulae are defined by changing power relations. In 1931, the British had ceded to the “White Dominions” full control over their foreign policy and defence, but the ultimate import of the Statute of Westminster was defined less by its text than by the changes wrought to Britain's geo-political and economic position by World War II and the emergence of the United States as the world's premier power. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that much of India's political elite, including Congress supporters like G.D. Birla, favored the retention of a political-constitutional tie to Britain as a guarantee against social disorder. In relegating India's achievement of full independence to an

undetermined future date, the Mahasabha was articulating the fears of its conservative supporters about the kind of mobilization that would be required to win full independence and the fate of their property in a Congress-governed Indian Republic.

Savarkar himself insisted that the change in the Mahasabha's stance was substantive. In July 1940 he told the Viceroy that the Mahasabhites feared India would break up if British power in South Asia collapsed and were thus "strongly in favor of a scheme which would retain his Majesty's government as an effective element."¹³

The Mahasabha responded to the Muslim League's March 1940 call for a sovereign federation of Muslim Indian states by demanding that the British colonial authorities dismiss the Pakistan Demand as illegitimate and reaffirm India's territorial integrity. The Mahasabhites also repeatedly called on the Governors of the Muslim-majority provinces to fulfill their constitutional obligation to protect the Hindu minority by using their prerogatives to disallow legislation and suspend responsible government. But the Mahasabha's chief demand as regards India's constitution—a demand it would press with increasing desperation throughout the war and indeed till June 1947—was that the government recognize the Hindu Mahasabha as the sole spokesman for India's Hindus and make any constitutional change contingent on its approval. The Congress, as the Mahasabhites never tired of pointing out, did not purport to represent the Hindu community, and therefore ought not to be considered as representative of the Hindus. "The Hindu Maha Sabha," declared its Working Committee in November 1939, "emphatically asserts that as the Congress does not and cannot represent the Hindus, no constitutional or administrative settlement arrived at behind the back of [the] Hindu

¹³ Linlithgow to Amery, 6 July 1940, L/P&J/8/507.

Mahsasabha between the Government on the one hand and the Congress or the League on the other, will be binding on the Hindus unless and until it is sanctioned by the Hindu Maha Sabha.”¹⁴ Subsequently, Savarkar would claim that Linlithgow’s placing of the Mahasabha on an equal footing with the Congress and the Muslim League at the time of his August 1940 Offer constituted a mighty step toward securing it just such a veto. Henceforth, he boasted, “the consent of the Congress alone can never be taken as the consent of Hindudom and can never be binding on the Hindus.”¹⁵

* * *

Europe’s “phony war” of the fall and winter 1939-40 had something of an Indian parallel. The INC’s October 1939 renunciation of its provincial ministries was followed not by a clash between the colonial state and the Indian national movement, but by a lull. India’s principal political actors made demands and threats but, when feasible, refrained from action. The Congress High Command dared not launch “a campaign of agitation,” explained the GOI Intelligence Bureau, for fear “the revolutionaries would take charge and run away with the machine,” leaving “the present leadership . . . permanently submerged.”¹⁶ The colonial state intensified its preparations to crush any Congress mass movement. Yet Viceroy Linlithgow kept open his lines of communication with the Congress leadership and counselled his subordinates and the India Office to “wait on events” and “lie back and not move.”¹⁷ Better to let the Congress fester in its internal divisions, than goad it into action. Even the Muslim League’s adoption of the Pakistan

¹⁴ Savarkar, *Whirlwind*, 164.

¹⁵ *Savarkar Writings*, 409.

¹⁶ Weekly Report of the Director, Intelligence Branch, 21 October 1939. L/P&J/12/481.

¹⁷ Tomlinson, 145.

Demand was largely a defensive maneuver, aimed at countering charges that the League had no positive program and upheld colonial rule.¹⁸

In the spring of 1940, the German blitzkrieg ended Europe's phoney war and hastily redrew its map. The fall in rapid succession of Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Holland, and France, led the British to conclude that they could no longer delay implicating India's political leaders more directly in the war effort. At the beginning of July, the War Cabinet decided a new approach should be made to India's political parties, after which the Viceroy's Council would be expanded to include representatives of those willing to ally themselves with the government.

The scheme's principal authors, Linlithgow and the Secretary of State for India, Amery, banked heavily on the Mahasabha's support. Believing the INC's rejection of their initiative all but inevitable, Linlithgow and Amery looked to the Mahasabha to serve as the Hindu counterpoise to the Muslim League on the Viceroy's Council. They and other imperial strategists recognized that the enmity between the two communal parties would introduce a highly combustible element into the government. But, in the interests of defusing communal tensions and countering the Congress, the British thought it prudent to have purported political representatives of both religio-political communities sitting on India's reconstituted Council. The Mahasabha, affirmed Linlithgow in late June 1940, represents "a very large body of substantial Hindu middle and upper class . . . and in combination with other elements, more particularly if they were not Hindu, might be of real substance."¹⁹

¹⁸ Viceroy Linlithgow was himself among those who prodded Jinnah to give the League "a positive program." See Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (New Delhi: CUP, 1994) 49.

¹⁹ Linlithgow to Amery, 30 June 1940, L/P&J/8/507.

For their part, the Mahasabhites responded to Britain's deteriorating military position, by demonstrating anew their eagerness to ally themselves with the colonial regime. In May, UP Governor Hallett informed Linlithgow he had received a telegram from Sir J.P. Srivastava offering to place his "services" and "resources" at the government's disposal. "Pray command me what I should do," pleaded the Cawnpore industrialist and former UP Minister.²⁰ Within three weeks of the Viceroy's 5 June 1940 announcement of the formation of War Committees and a Civic Guard, Savarkar issued a general circular to the Hindu Sabhas that stipulated Mahasabhites were "not debarred by the Working Committee from joining in their individual capacities the committees, guards, etc. . . ."²¹ And join they did. Two months later, when Savarkar submitted to the Viceroy a panel of seven nominees for the proposed War Advisory Council, he hastened to inform Linlithgow, it was comprised exclusively of Mahasabhite leaders who were already serving on the government's War Committees.²²

The Viceroy's 8 August 1940 "offer" closely conformed to the policy the British had laid down the previous October. India's ascension to Dominion status was proclaimed the "goal" of British rule, thus consigning its realization to the distant future. The India Act would be opened for amendment, but only at the war's conclusion. The assurances to the princes and to the Muslim and Depressed Class political elites that they would not be left at the INC's mercy in any post-war revision of the constitution were

²⁰ Haig to Linlithgow, 19 May 1940, L/P&J/8/507.

²¹ Savarkar, although declining the government's request that he sit on the [War] Publicity Committee, suggested that the Mahasabhites Raja Narayanlal Pitti and Rao Bahadur S.K. Bole "be utilised in connection with the Civic Guard movement." Savarkar to the Secretary, Governor of Bombay, 22 June 1940. Savarkar Papers, Roll 24, NMML.

²² Savarkar to Linlithgow 19 August 1940, L/P&J/8/507.

amplified.²³ As in October, Linlithgow pledged to increase Indian political leaders' role in the central government. But the expansion of the Executive Council and establishment of a war advisory committee were no longer made contingent on India's main political parties—read the Congress and the Muslim League—joining forces in the provincial ministries, as well as in the central government, to support the war effort. Rather these changes were to be implemented immediately.

Congress leaders voiced their hostility to the Viceroy's Offer even as it was being published. The Mahasabha was almost as quick in declaring, in the name of "responsive cooperation" and Hindu militarization, its readiness to work the new scheme. On August 12, the Viceroy was able to report to the Secretary of State for India that Savarkar had already forwarded him a panel of Mahasabha nominees for the Executive Council.²⁴ (Under the terms of the Offer, Linlithgow was to choose the "party" representatives on his Council and the new War Advisory Council from panels submitted by the cooperating parties.) The Mahasabhites "are prepared to co-operate and make no embarrassing demands," wrote Linlithgow soon after.²⁵

Prior to launching their summer 1940 initiative to more closely associate India's political leaders with the war effort, the Government of India (GOI) and the India Office resolved to proceed even if the Congress spurned their overtures and continued to non-cooperate. Indeed, the initiative was undertaken with every expectation that the expansion of the Executive Council and the establishment of the War Advisory Council

²³ The British, affirmed Linlithgow in his August 8 Declaration, "could not contemplate transfer of their present responsibilities ... to any system of Government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's nation." Subsequently, Amery named the princes, Muslims, and Depressed Classes as "elements" meriting recognition as "separate constituent factors in any future Indian polity."

²⁴ Linlithgow to Amery, 12 August 1940, L/P&J/8/507.

²⁵ Linlithgow to Amery, 25 August 1940, L/P&J/8/507.

would have to be implemented over Congress opposition. By contrast, the colonial authorities gave little thought to what they would do if the Muslim League persisted in demanding a greater share of power than they were ready to give. In early July, Linlithgow, Amery and the Provincial Governors expressed alarm over Jinnah's "tentative" terms for the League's entry into government.²⁶ The War Cabinet was duly informed that the support of Jinnah and the Muslim League Working Committee for the proposed initiative was far from certain.²⁷ But concentrated consideration was not given to the implications of proceeding with an "Indianization" of the central government in the face of opposition from the League, as well as the Congress. Within weeks of the August 8 offer, however, this issue had to be squarely addressed.

The ever shrewd Jinnah held off playing his hand till the Congress had officially rejected Linlithgow's offer at a meeting of its Working Committee August 18-22. To signal to the Viceroy that he was ready to bargain and allay the concerns of those within his own organization who were anxious to enter the government, Jinnah got the League Working Committee to pass resolutions welcoming the offer, but not its particulars, and lifting the ban on Muslim Leaguers' participation in the War Committees. Then in various public statements and in correspondence and meetings with the Viceroy, he demanded that the League be given the majority of the seats on the two councils and a role in governing the provinces being ruled under Section 93. Such a price was fair, Jinnah claimed, since the League was the only mass-based opponent of the Congress and would have to shoulder the burden of any confrontation with it.²⁸ Suspecting, rightly,

²⁶ Linlithgow to Amery, 6 July 1940 and other correspondence in L/P&J/8/507

²⁷ "India and the War," War Cabinet Memorandum, 6 July 1940, L/P&J/8/507.

²⁸ Linlithgow to SS, 25 September 1940; Nawab of Chhatari to Jinnah, enclosure in Linlithgow to Amery, 3 November 1940, L/P&J/8/507.

that Linlithgow and Amery had not renounced all hope of enticing the Congress into the government, Jinnah attached particular importance to obtaining a British promise that if the League joined the government, the composition of the Viceroy's Council would not be changed without its consent.

If Jinnah's stand chagrined the colonial regime, it made the Mahasabhis apoplectic with rage. The Mahasabha Working Committee meeting of September 21-22 asserted that as the Mahasabha was the representative organization of India's Hindus, it could accept no less than three times the number of seats respectively allotted the League on the two councils. The meeting also voted to withdraw the panel of nominees Savarkar had submitted to the Viceroy, so that it could be expanded in line with the Mahasabha's new demands.²⁹

Moonje, who was negotiating with the Viceroy as Savarkar was ill, urged Linlithgow to deal brusquely with the League. If the impression got about that the government was being bossed by Jinnah, warned Moonje, the Raj's stature would be damaged and its authority seriously weakened.³⁰ In a 16 September interview, Moonje told Linlithgow that the Hindus and the Hindu Mahasabha would be much better partners for the government than the Muslims and Muslim League. The Muslims, Moonje charged, had external loyalties and past experience had shown that "once things got hot inside India ..." they "transferred their weight to the leg outside India." The Hindus, by contrast, "could be relied on to stand by" the British.³¹ Ten days later Moonje was even more explicit in championing an Anglo-Hindu alliance. While Muslims were the traditional enemies of Hindusthan, having subjected it to repeated invasions for more

²⁹ *Hindu Outlook*, 28 September 1940.

³⁰ Moonje to Linlithgow, 18 September 1940, L/P&J/8/507.

³¹ Linlithgow to Amery, 17 September 1940, L/P&J/8/507.

than a thousand years, the British and the Hindus shared an interest in defending India against external aggression: "Thus Hindusthan and Britain are allied together in unshakeable bond of union for long years to come."³² Fearing that Linlithgow did not appreciate the Mahasabha's political weight, Moonje urged him to consider the Mahasabha's close ties to the princes, "who are no insignificant supporters of the war efforts." "From this point of view," asserted the veteran Mahasabha leader, "the status and importance of the Hindu Mahasabha in relation to the work in hand is immeasurably greater than that of the Congress."³³

The Mahasabha's visceral reaction to Jinnah's demands confirmed the GOI's and India Office's fears as to its volatility and propensity for communal squabbling. (Jinnah, for his part, was now urging the Viceroy to jettison the Mahasabha from the expansion plan since it "represented nothing" and "would be of no assistance.")³⁴ Had the Mahasabha acted differently, it is highly—nay, extremely—unlikely the British would have persevered with the council expansion. But in rushing to the charge against the League, the Mahasabha facilitated the government's retreat and lost some of the credit its enthusiastic support for the war effort and willingness to join the government had earned it with the colonial authorities. Three weeks after Linlithgow had praised the Mahasabhites for their "political realism," he was deploring their "unwisdom." "[I]n putting these exaggerated demands," he declared, the Mahasabhites, "have to some extent put themselves out of court . . ."³⁵

³² Moonje to Linlithgow, 26 September 1940, L/P&J/8/507.

³³ Moonje to Linlithgow, 3 October 1940, L/P&J/8/507.

³⁴ Linlithgow to Amery, 25 September 1940, L/P&J/8/507.

³⁵ Linlithgow to Amery, 17 September 1940; Linlithgow to Amery, 8 October 1940, enclosure to Memorandum of SS to War Cabinet W.P. (G) (40) 260, 11 October 1940, L/P&J/8/507.

The colonial authorities were anxious to bring Jinnah and the League into government, but were disinclined to part with much real power. When it became clear that the cost of League support would far exceed Linlithgow's offer of two seats on a Viceroy's Council of ten or more and five seats on an advisory war committee of at least 25, the negotiations collapsed. In his "August 8 Offer," Linlithgow had vowed to proceed forthwith with the expansion of his Council, drawing in those political groups that were ready to support the government and ignoring the others, but the Muslim League's stance resulted in a rapid policy reversal. Notwithstanding the loss of government prestige involved, Linlithgow soon convinced the Secretary of State that it was better to suspend the Council expansion, than drive the League into opposition or cause it to fracture. His concerns were both with ensuring the League's backing in a war-time confrontation with the Congress and in maintaining the League as a counter-weight to the Congress in any post-war revision of the constitution.³⁶ Thus, in an ironic twist, the Mahasabhis' plans to join the British Indian government were dashed by the decision of their Muslim League foes to "non-cooperate."

On several subsequent occasions, most notably in April and August 1942, this pattern was to be repeated. If the Mahasabha never formally entered the British Indian government, it was not because the colonial authorities had reservations about accepting the Hindu communalists' offer of an alliance. Rather, it was because the British were never able to entice or bully over the threshold the Mahasabha's intended partner in a "popular Indian government"—the Muslim League.

³⁶ "It is I suspect of real importance to keep together some authoritative mouthpiece of general Muslim opinion in this country . . . more particularly in view of post-war constitutional discussions. Nor, do we want, at a time when we have to take the Congress on, unnecessarily to antagonize the . . . second largest party and community in this country." Linlithgow to Amery 8 October 1940, enclosure to memorandum cited above.

Only on 20 November 1940 did London officially announce that the reorganization of the British Indian government was being suspended until "such support may be forthcoming" as to make the two councils "reasonably representative." But by late September, it had become apparent to the Mahasabhites that the government had taken strong exception to their demand for thrice the council seats given the League and might scuttle the reorganization scheme altogether. The Mahasabha's subsequent pleas to the Viceroy underscore their eagerness to enter the government and gain the colonial authorities' favor. In a letter dated 25 September, Savarkar tried to reassure the Viceroy that the demands made by the Mahasabha at its recent Working Committee Meeting were a propaganda ploy and should not be taken seriously. They were made, he explained, not to obstruct the reorganization scheme, but "to checkmate the aggressive demands of the Muslim League." "If but these aggressive demands are not conceded to, the counter demands of the Mahasabha can automatically be eliminated . . ."³⁷ Three days later the Mahasabha President wrote to Moonje to urge him "not to scare away the Viceroy" by insisting on "the naturally complicated resolutions" passed by the Mahasabha Working Committee.³⁸ By October 12, the Hindu Mahasabha President was prepared to accept the government's offer of a lone Executive Council seat, although this amounted to half the seats the government had offered the League. There was "now no difficulty regarding numerical proportions or other serious impediments" to the Mahasabha joining the government, Savarkar telegraphed the Viceroy.³⁹

³⁷ Savarkar to Linlithgow, 25 September 1940, L/P&J/8/507.

³⁸ Savarkar to Moonje, 28 September 1940, Savarkar Papers, Microfilm Reel 6.

³⁹ Savarkar to Linlithgow, 12 October 1940, L/P&J/8/507.

Anxious not to alienate an ally by failing to credit it for proving pliant, Amery took note of the shift in the Mahasabha's stance when he publicly announced the failure of the scheme to bring Indian political leaders into government: "In the case of the Mahasabha," Amery told the British House of Commons, "they too put their claims too high as a rejoinder to the Moslem [League] demand, although I believe they were ready to modify them afterwards."⁴⁰

The Mahasabhites were keenly disappointed by the shelving of the reorganization scheme. But they did not slacken their support for the British war effort or abandon their hopes of forming a governmental partnership with the colonial regime. The main policy resolution of the Mahasabha's December 1940 annual session began by voicing the organization's "appreciation" that the government had recognized "the political situation in the country cannot be satisfactorily solved without the co-operation of the Hindu Mahasabha . . ." The Mahasabha, it went on to declare, "has no faith in any scheme of barren non-cooperation;" "Responsive co-operation has been, is still, and will be the policy of the Mahasabha."⁴¹

In his presidential address, Savarkar was even more forthright in advocating the Hindu Mahasabha ally with the colonial regime. Alliances based on "points of common interest" are, he declared, essential in "practical politics."⁴² Already, the Mahasabha's alliance with the British had brought it a rich bounty, contended Savarkar. The Raj's recognition of the Mahasabha as India's "third great political organization" and "foremost representative of Hindu political opinion" during the negotiations over the

⁴⁰ Lord Amery's 20 November 1940 House of Commons speech on "India, Burma, and Colonial War Effort," reproduced in L/P&J/8/683.

⁴¹ *Mahratta*, 10 January 1941.

⁴² *Savarkar Writings*, 428-29.

August 1940 offer was “the outstanding event in the history of the Hindu Mahasabha movement.” Ignoring his own admonitions on the need for political sangfroid, to say nothing of the government’s rescinding of its plan to expand the Viceroy’s Council, Savarkar confidently affirmed that the Hindu Mahasabha was “bound to” attend any future constitutional deliberations “on an equal footing with the League and the Congress.”⁴³

The Mahasabha’s 1940 Madura Session voted to intensify the Mahasabha’s support for the British war effort, and this decision was soon given practical effect with the establishment of *Hindu Sainikikaran Mandals* (Military Boards) at the national, provincial and district level.⁴⁴ The Mahasabha’s contribution to war recruitment awaits scholarly investigation, but its Hindu Military Boards were more than paper bodies. Thousands of Hindu youths were enlisted in the Indian Army and hundreds obtained King’s and Viceroy’s commissions with the help of the Mahasabha’s Military Mandals, or at least so claimed Savarkar in December 1942.⁴⁵ The government and military took an interest in, and co-operated with, the Mahasabha’s recruitment boards. In May 1941, the Commander-in-Chief of the British Indian Army invited the head of the UP Hindu Military Board, Sir J.P. Srivastava, to meet with him to discuss war recruitment.⁴⁶ Two months later, Srivastava was named by the Viceroy to the newly-established National Defence Council.

Srivastava’s elevation points to an important factor facilitating official co-operation with the Mahasabha’s recruitment campaign—Mahasabhaites in no small

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 406-409.

⁴⁴ Minutes of Mahasabha Working Meeting 9-11 March 1941, HMS Papers, File C-30.

⁴⁵ *Savarkar Writings*, 497.

⁴⁶ *Hindu Outlook*, 27 May 1941.

number helped staff the government war mobilization effort. Mahasabha leaders and sympathizers who served on the government War Committees, the National Defence Council, or the National War Front, included, from UP, the aforementioned Srivastava, the *taluqdar* Hari Seth, and Gopinath Kunzru; from Bihar, Kunar Ganganand Sinha; Bombay, Jamnadas Mehta, S.K. Bole and N.C. Kelkar; Berar, B.G. Khaparde, S.R. Kanitkar and Dwarka Prasad Shrivastav; Madras, Dr. P. Varadarajulu Naidu; Orissa, Nilkanatha Das; and the Punjab, Raja Narendra Nath.⁴⁷ Moonje and other prominent Mahasabha leaders addressed recruitment *melas*.⁴⁸ Narayan Apte, a Mahasabhite since 1939 and one of Gandhi's future assassins, doubled for several years as a leader of Savarkar's Hindu Rashtra Dal and a recruiting officer (first temporary, then commissioned) for the Royal Indian Air Force.⁴⁹ In the final year of the war, when the colonial authorities considered the convening of a constitutional conference, government officials frequently linked the Mahasabha's participation in such a conference to the need to give representation to those who had supported the war, especially "India's fighting men." Sir F. Mudie, the Home member on the Viceroy's Council, argued for a Mahasabha representative to be invited, for "otherwise we might give offence to all those Hindus, in the Army, and outside it, who have supported Government during the war."⁵⁰

⁴⁷ *Mahratta*, 25 July 1941; *Leader* 8 July 1942; Christophe Jaffrelot, "Des nationalistes en quête d'une nation. Les partis nationalistes hindous au XXème siècle," Ph.D., Institut d'Études Politiques, Paris, 1991, [Hereafter, Dissertation] 394; Savarkar to Linlithgow, 19 August 1942, L/P&J/8/507.

⁴⁸ Hindu Mahasabha General Secretary's Report for 1943, HMS Papers, File C-40.

⁴⁹ Malgonkar, *The Men who killed Gandhi*, 29, and 34-36.

⁵⁰ Nicholas Mansergh et al, eds., *Constitutional Relations Between Britain and India: Transfer of Power 1942-47*, Vol. 5 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1970-83) 22. Hereafter, *TOP*.

See also the report of the 31-1-1945 meeting of the India Committee of the War Cabinet. At the urging of the Secretary of State for War, the meeting resolved that a telegram be sent to the Viceroy instructing him to give due weight "to the position and claims of other important elements in India's national life such as the Hindu Mahasabha . . ." (*TOP*, 5: 494)

N. Gondhalekar and S. Bhattacharya have termed the Mahasabha's war-time alliance with the colonial authorities a "truce" and suggested it is comparable to the relationship that the Communist Party of India (CPI) struck with the British Indian government following Germany's June 1941 invasion of the USSR.⁵¹ This is a facile argument that obscures far more than it enlightens, for it fails to place the Mahasabha's war policy in the context of its emergence as a right-wing, communal party in open opposition to the Congress. Ignoring the Mahasabha's privileged constituency, longstanding opposition to non-co-operation, and staunch defence of the princely and landlord orders, Gondhalekar and Bhattacharya blithely accept Savarkar's claims as to the conjunctural and tactical character of the Mahasabha's war-time alliance with India's colonial regime.

The imperative of winning the war and the opposition of the Congress did compel the British, as Linlithgow observed, to work with "those whom they could find and not with whom they wanted."⁵² But, in contradistinction to the CPI, the Mahasabha had long criticized the Congress for agitating for a quick end to British rule and instead advocated "responsive co-operation" with the colonial regime.

Reviewing the Mahasabha's emergence as a political party, G.V. Ketkar, a nephew of Tilak and leader of the Mahasabha in Maharashtra, observed that even when Mahasabha leaders had participated in the Congress they had opposed civil disobedience and the boycott of Raj institutions.⁵³ "It was . . . the unthinking and spasmodic non-cooperation of the Congress," asserted the *Mahratta* in a September 1940 editorial, "that

⁵¹ Nandini Gondhalekar and Sanjoy Bhattacharya, "The All-India Hindu Mahasabha and the end of British rule in India, 1939-1947," *Social Scientist*, V. 27, 1999: 48-74.

⁵² As cited in Gondhalekar and Bhattacharya, 54.

⁵³ *IAR*, I, 1941: 279.

led the British to rely on the support of Muslim communalism. . . . It is the Congress non-co-operation that makes it possible every time for the Muslims to secure a disproportionate importance.” The *Mahratta* went on to make an implicit call for an Anglo-Hindu alliance, reminding its readers that the Hindu Mahasabha “had as far back as 1932 called upon the Hindus ‘to take all steps necessary both in the legislature and outside for frustrating the objects of the Anglo Muslim alliance’.”⁵⁴

The British government had invited the then Mahasabha President B.S. Moonje to all three sessions of the (1930-32) Round Table Conference. Nevertheless, before the war, the colonial authorities had put little stock in the Mahasabha and, apart from such favors as granting it property in New Delhi for its headquarters and supporting Moonje’s project to establish a Hindu military school, did little to boost it. The British were wary of the Mahasabha’s virulence and reputed involvement in communal riots.⁵⁵ More fundamentally, had the British promoted “Hindu” political organization and political consciousness with the same consistency and vigor as they did Muslim, they would have risked antagonizing the Muslim political elite, whose support was deemed pivotal in meeting the Congress challenge.

Yet, if the British had not previously patronized them as Mahasabhites, the Mahasabha leaders appointed to the war committees and other official and semi-official posts were, nonetheless, almost all individuals with whom the British had worked closely in the past, as during the 1937 interim ministries. In 1945, when S.P. Mookerjee

⁵⁴ *Mahratta*, 13 September 1940.

⁵⁵ Typical was the following assessment from the “Quarterly Survey of Political and Constitutional Position in British India,” for February through April 1938: “As an organization, the Mahasabha cannot claim great weight—though it has in places proved its competence at the popular pastime of communal strife.” See B. Chatterji, ed., *Towards Freedom—1938*, 250.

attempted to recast the Mahasabha as a Congress ally, the number of Mahasabhites who held knighthoods and other British titles proved a major embarrassment.

By contrast, the CPI had not been permitted to function as a legal party for much of its existence and its leaders had repeatedly been subject to arrest and imprisonment. Nor was there ever any question of CPI leaders joining the British Indian administration at either the all-India or provincial level, although the party did honor its commitment to work for the success of the war effort, standing aloof from the Quit India movement and working to constrain labor and peasant militancy.

If more appropriate and rewarding parallels are wanted, they will be found by comparing the Mahasabha's war-time policy and alliance with the British to the stance taken by a number of other political groupings that, like the Mahasabha, sought a place at the post-war constitution-making table and British recognition as the sole spokesman for a state-defined religio-political community. These include the Muslim League, the Sikh Akali Dal and Ambedkar's Scheduled Caste Federation.⁵⁶

But that task need not detain us now. If we are to understand the real import of the Mahasabha's war-time alliance with the British colonial authorities, we must do what Gondhalekar and Bhattacharya failed to do: make a detailed examination of the Mahasabha's militarization policy—the ostensible basis of its cooperation with the British—and establish its place in the overall development of the Mahasabha.

⁵⁶ This is not to say that one can simply equate the anti-Congress stance of Ambedkar and a broad section of the Depressed Classes political elite with that of the Hindu Mahasabha. Rooted in the urban middle class and locally dominant peasant castes, the Congress had, by acts of omission and commission, given India's Untouchables reason to be wary of its emancipatory claims.

Nevertheless, the anti-Congress Depressed Class politicians' support for the British war effort and British Indian government paralleled that of the Mahasabha. M.C. Rajah and P.N. Rajbhoj were named to the National Defence Council. Ambedkar was elevated to the Viceroy's Council in July 1942 at the same time as UP Mahasabha leader Sir J.P. Srivastava. Having supported the government, including in its suppression of the Quit India movement, Ambedkar and his Scheduled Caste Federation felt, like the Mahasabhites, betrayed when the British moved, at the war's end, to make a settlement with the Congress.

II: Savarkar's War Policy and the Mahasabha's Political Trajectory

The Hindu Mahasabha's war policy harnessed traditional nationalist themes to the pursuit of Hindu supremacy. Collaboration with the British war effort, argued the Mahasabha, provided the means to Indianize the armed forces, force repeal of the discriminatory Arms Act, overturn the Raj's martial races policy, and promote India's industrial development. Britain's need for soldiers, munitions and armaments was Hindudom's opportunity.⁵⁷

Elaborating on the Mahasabha's war policy in his 1940 Presidential address, Savarkar observed that the British Indian government had already raised a hundred thousand additional Indian troops, trebled the size of the air force, scrapped the British quasi-monopoly on officering the Indian Army, and ordered the indigenous manufacture of "war materials on an enormous scale." The exigencies of war had compelled the British to do more in a single year to facilitate "the militarization and industrialization of our people" than they had during the previous fifty.⁵⁸

Savarkar took the Congress leadership to task for suggesting, with its call for Britain to clarify her war aims, that India's colonial masters could be induced to fight for reasons other than their "own self-interest and self-aggrandisement." All the major powers, Britain included, were "out to thrust the will and the domination of their nations upon other peoples ..." ⁵⁹

In expanding India's military and industrial might, the British had "no altruistic motives," cautioned Savarkar. But opposition to colonial rule should not blind Hindus to

⁵⁷ The authoritative explanation of the Mahasabha's war policy was provided by Savarkar in his December 1940, Madura Presidential Address. See *Savarkar Writings*, 415-436.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 427-433.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 415-417.

the coincidence between their interests and those of the British. "Hindu Sangathanists," proclaimed Savarkar, "[f]eel no hesitation and ought to feel no hesitation in extending a whole-hearted participation in the war efforts of Great Britain if but it serves their own purpose better than any other course."⁶⁰ Thus for Savarkar, the war was a test of Hindus' capacity to act ruthlessly in their own self-interest. Would Hindus follow the Congress in chasing utopian dreams like Hindu-Muslim unity, *satyagraha* and *ahimsa* or would they prove the equal of other nations whose actions were governed by realpolitik, not airy sentiment?

An accomplished demagogue, Savarkar used martial imagery and savage critiques of Gandhi's pacifist beliefs to suggest that with its militarization policy the Mahasabha was laying the groundwork for a future violent challenge to British rule. Given the colonial state's monopoly of military might, "an armed revolt on a national scale" was presently impracticable. But the war, Savarkar hastened to add, was revolutionizing the planet and the Hindu race could suddenly "find an opportunity to assert itself."⁶¹

Navigators abide by the tide. Even lions lie in wait. Great dread-naughts are built in silent and hidden quarters of the ports before they are called out in action and can with their multi-throated roar and fire route (*sic*) their opponents.⁶²

From the lips of virtually anyone else in the Mahasabha leadership such allusions to insurrectionary designs would have been laughable. However, Savarkar's terrorist past, bellicose rhetoric, and aggressive demeanour lent them a wholly unwarranted tinge of plausibility.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 428-29,

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 421 and 500.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 385.

Although the Mahasabha's militarization policy drew on traditional nationalist discourse, its thrust was patently anti-Muslim. Not only did Mahasabhite leaders routinely exhort their followers to prepare for civil war against the "anti-national" Muslim minority; from the earliest days of the war, they explicitly linked their Hindu militarization campaign and India's defence from foreign attack with the need to counter the purported Muslim threat. The call to defend India from external **and** internal or "anti-Hindu" aggression became the Mahasabha's watchword. Use the British war effort to militarize the "Hindu race," urged Savarkar, for then "we shall be able to defend our own country, hearths and homes if we are actually attacked by alien forces from outside or by an internal anti-Hindu anarchy . . ." Moonje appealed for Hindus to rally to the Mahasabha's newly-created National Militia (it was subsequently renamed the Ram Sena) "for the purpose of taking part in the defence of India both from external and internal aggression . . ."⁶³

The Mahasabhites complained that under Gandhi's influence the Congress had muted its traditional call for the Indianization of the armed forces and scrapping of the Arms Act. However, their real goal was not so much the Indianization of the armed forces as their "Hindu-ization." The Mahasabha aimed to revive the martial spirit of the Hindus, "secure permanently a dominant position for the Hindus in the Indian army, navy and air forces," and make the Hindus once again a conquering race. Declared Savarkar:

I want the Hindus to get themselves re-animated and reborn into a martial race ... conquering those who dared (*sic*) to be aggressive against us and refraining ourselves, not out of weakness but out of magnanimity, from any unjustifiable designs of aggression against the unoffending.⁶⁴

⁶³ *Hindu Outlook*, 4 November 1941; Circular letter of 27 September 1939, Moonje Papers, File 57.

⁶⁴ *Hindu Outlook* 4 November, 1941; Savarkar, *Writings*, V. 6: 426.

In a new rendition of a now familiar argument, the Mahasabhites claimed that if the INC's call for a boycott of the government war effort succeeded, "the Moslems will get into the saddle and instead of weakening the British government you will find that you have strengthened a second enemy who is no less bent upon subjecting you to helotage in your own land."⁶⁵

The Hindu Mahasabha-sponsored Hindu Militarization Boards were, as their name suggests, exclusively devoted to enlisting and serving the needs of Hindu recruits. Initially, some Mahasabhites wanted to press the Raj to enlist only Hindus until the percentage of Hindu military personnel matched their percentage in the general population.⁶⁶ But because this demand did not sit well with the British, the Mahasabhites soon concluded that their objective of Hindu-izing the military would be better achieved by working with the colonial authorities to raise as many Hindu troops as possible.⁶⁷ The Mahasabha also hoped to associate its efforts to build up its own para-military, Hindu "volunteer" force, the Ram Sena, with the British war effort. But here too the colonial authorities were discouraging.

⁶⁵ *Savarkar Writings*, 436.

⁶⁶ Presiding over a conference in Lucknow, Moonje "suggested the starting of an India-wide agitation for pressing on the Government the wisdom of stopping or curtailing the recruitment of Moslems to the Army in order to bring down their strength in proportion to the population." (*Hindu Outlook*, 7 March 1940.)

⁶⁷ The Mahasabha's concern with the communal composition of the armed forces was far from unique. The Muslim League called for the Muslim percentage of India's military personnel to be maintained. However, like the Mahasabha, it appears to have quickly realized that the British were not going to let communal politicians intrude in an area of such vital importance to the maintenance of the Raj.

The Akali Dal also placed great importance on maintaining Sikh communal proportional strength in the armed forces. Although Akali leader Master Tara Singh publicly portrayed his September 1940 resignation from the All-India Congress Committee and Punjab Congress as a matter of personal honor, his true motivation was opposition to the INC's war policy. See Linlithgow to Amery, 14 September 1940 (L/P&J/8/507). Later, "when it seemed the proportion of Sikhs in the British Indian armed forces might be declining," the Sikh political elite, with the support of the Maharaja of Patiala, founded the Khalsa Defence League "to stimulate recruiting and protect the interests of enlisted Sikhs." Barbara N. Ramusack, "Punjab States: Maharajas and Gurdwaras: Patiala and the Sikh Community," Robin Jeffrey, ed., *People, Princes and Paramount Power* (Delhi: OUP, 1978) 193.

Given the depth of Indian nationalist sentiment, especially among the Hindu middle classes, it is not surprising Savarkar found it politic to suggest the Mahasabha's support for the colonial regime was limited to "military cooperation." The Mahasabha President spoke of "allying with Britain **on this point alone**," of "extending responsive cooperation to the British Government in this war **in so far** as the question of Indian defence is concerned," and of Hindu *Sangathanists* "ally[ing] ourselves actively with the British Government **on the point of Indian Defence**."⁶⁸

The truth was very different. The Mahasabha aspired to become a government party—to parlay its support for the war, opposition to the Congress, and ties to the princely and landlord orders into seats on the Viceroy's Council and a share of power in the provinces. So confident was the Viceroy of the Mahasabha's support that he became almost cavalier about it. Following India's rejection of the 1942 "Cripps Offer," Linlithgow told the Secretary of State:

I am not much bothered by the Mahasabha. I dare say that one could get another member of that body into my Council at any stage without any difficulty—they would hate to be left out and they are passionately anxious, despite the excessive claims they make from time to time, to have a finger in the pie.⁶⁹

The claim that Hindu militarization was the Mahasabha's only aim in allying with the colonial authorities was belied by Savarkar himself. In public *fora* he clearly articulated two other Mahasabha objectives: to prevent the Muslims from becoming the sole or at least principal beneficiaries of official patronage; and to win British recognition as the representative of Hindus' political aspirations and seats at any future constitutional

⁶⁸ Emphasis added. *Savarkar Writings*, 435, 445 and 461.

⁶⁹ Linlithgow to Amery, 14 April 1942, *TOP*, 1: 775.

conference. Mahasabha ministers, insisted Savarkar, were “most essential to get [the] Hindu Mahasabha recognised as an indispensable and separate constituent in any constitution making body which may be called after the war is over.”⁷⁰

The Mahasabha’s war policy was also directed at solidifying support among the princes, landlords and other elite layers who were searching for a political instrument to oppose the Congress. Indian big business saw the war as a unique opportunity to capture the internal market and secure state aid to develop new ventures. In his Madura address, Savarkar lauded Walchand Hirachand for opening a shipyard and securing government permission to begin airplane manufacture.⁷¹ Hirachand was on intimate terms with the leaders of the Congress right, but his brother and fellow businessman, Gulabchand Hirachand, served in the Mahasabha leadership.⁷² Opposition from the Mahasabha’s big business supporters would play a major role in the Mahasabha’s 1941 decision to abandon an attempt to bolster its militant and nationalist credentials by mounting an anti-British commercial boycott. In his memoirs, UP Muslim League leader Choudhry Khaliquzzaman observed that the Muslim *taluqdars* and *zamindars* followed the lead of the business magnates “in their own humble way” and sought to secure war “contracts for the supply of wood, charcoal and other smaller commodities.” The Mahasabha’s landlord supporters, we can safely assume, were no more willing than their Muslim counterparts to forego what Khaliquzzaman termed “the chance of a lifetime.”⁷³ The princes, meanwhile, were intent on using the war to mend fences with the *Raj*. By providing

⁷⁰ V.D. Savarkar to Mehr Chand Khanna, 12 June 1943, SPM Papers, Installment II-IV, File 57.

⁷¹ *Savarkar Writings*, 432.

⁷² Gulabchand Hirachand was a member of Mahasabha’s All-India Committee in 1940-41 and vice-president of the Maharashtra Provincial Hindu Mahasabha in 1943-44. (HMS Papers, Files C-29 and P-36.)

⁷³ Choudhry Khaliquzzaman, *Pathway to Pakistan* (Lahore: Longman’s Pakistan, 1961) 243.

strong support for the British war effort, the princes hoped to mollify the anger in New Delhi and London over their refusal to support the Federation scheme.⁷⁴

The Mahasabha urged the princes to fulfill their traditional role as protectors of Hindu *dharma* and Hindudom. This was an appeal to the princes' vanity. It also reinforced the legitimacy of the princely order at a time when princely rule was increasingly challenged by peasant unrest and demands for democratic reform. The Mahasabhites called on the princes to embrace Hindu *sangathan* and Hindu militarization, arguing that the "organized power of the Hindu states" could prove pivotal in any future conflict with the Muslims. But to grasp their full import, the Mahasabha's calls for the princes to lead Hindudom in resisting all external and internal aggression must be placed in the context of the Mahasabha's charge that the Congress was "interfering" in the states and encouraging "anarchy" by supporting demands for responsible government and relief of peasant distress. The Mahasabhites, or at least the more extreme Hindu nationalists like Savarkar and Parmanand, were inciting the princes to augment their military forces at least in part because they hoped thereby to make the princely order better able to withstand the states' people's movement. Lest the reader think I am exaggerating, let us fast-forward to the Mahasabha's December 1946 session. It passed a resolution offering "hearty congratulations" to the Hindu rulers of Kashmir and Travancore for "putting down" the "subversive activities" of the Congress.⁷⁵ In fact,

⁷⁴ A measure of the princes' strong support for the war was the large amount of money that the states raised for the Viceroy's War Fund. 6.5 of the 11.64 crore rupees contributed to the fund, which was dedicated to providing relief to British Indian forces, came from the states. See P.G. Edwin, "Travancore and Paramount Power—a study in wartime relationship," *Journal of Indian History*, 51 (1973): 418.

⁷⁵ HMS Papers, File M-9.

both Maharajas had used state violence to quell popular unrest. At least 200 and possibly as many as 2,000 were killed by Travancore's police and armed forces in October 1946.⁷⁶

The Mahasabha's war-time collaboration with the colonial regime, although unprecedented, was in keeping with the rightward trajectory of Mahasabhite politics. Opposition to Gandhian non-cooperation had been among the principal currents alighting the Mahasabha from its revival in 1922/23. In the 1930s the Mahasabha had self-consciously broken with the Congress, rejecting the INC's liberal-territorial definition of the nation and purported embrace of "socialism," and organized itself as a rival political current. Likewise, the idea of an Anglo-Hindu alliance had long been germinating among the Hindu nationalists as exemplified by Parmanand's 1933 Mahasabha presidential address.⁷⁷

In their discussions and correspondence with the Viceroy, Moonje and Savarkar argued for an Anglo-Hindu alliance. "[T]he political interests of the Hindus," Savarkar told Linlithgow, "are on the whole allied with British interests as never before, and a hearty alliance between them can but conduce to their mutual benefit and strength,"⁷⁸ Such talk was not merely for the government's benefit. "Our enemy and enemy No. 1 are the Moslems," wrote Moonje to Savarkar.⁷⁹

In public, however, Savarkar seldom if ever used the term Anglo-Hindu alliance. Rather he spoke of "military co-operation" or of "responsive co-operation," the term that Tilak had coined in 1919 to encapsulate his attitude toward the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms and which was revived by his followers when they broke with the Swaraj Party

⁷⁶ Copland, *The Princes of India in the Endgame of Empire*, 232.

⁷⁷ *IAR*, II, 1944: 206.

⁷⁸ Savarkar to Linlithgow, 2 October 1940, L/PJ/8/683.

⁷⁹ Moonje to Savarkar 3 June 1941, Moonje Papers, File 29 (NMML) as cited in P.K. Jose, "Responsivists and Indian National Movement," *Journal of Indian History*, V. 54 (1976): 639.

and contested the 1926 provincial elections on a program of office acceptance. As was his wont, Savarkar tried to give responsive co-operation a revolutionary gloss. In a speech largely devoted to justifying the Mahasabha's opposition to the Quit India movement, he claimed responsive co-operation "covers the whole gamut of patriotic activities from unconditional co-operation right up to active and even armed resistance."⁸⁰

In truth, the difference between Savarkar's responsive cooperation and Parmanand's Anglo-Hindu alliance was wholly rhetorical. They were based on the same extreme communalist premises: Hindus confronted an Anglo-Muslim bloc, in which all Muslims, irrespective of class distinctions, were implicated;⁸¹ the Muslims, not British colonialism, constituted the biggest threat to Hindu aspirations. Like Parmanand, Savarkar poured scorn on the INC's analysis of the communal problem, which held that the British *Raj* bore the principal responsibility for the communal antagonism and which drew a connection between imperialist domination and the competition for jobs and patronage among India's hard-pressed middle classes. Savarkar termed the so-called Third Party theory the "silliest of political superstitions."

As if the history of the last ten centuries of perpetual war between the Hindus and Moslems was an interpolation and a myth. ...

[T]he Moslem religion, theocratic traditions and history all imbue them with inherent ambition of Islamic political sovereignty. The British policy at times when its suits British interest does of course act as a match—but the explosive magazine is genuinely Moslem.⁸²

⁸⁰ *Savarkar Writings*, 474.

⁸¹ The Mahasabha's railings against the Anglo-Muslim alliance are indicative of its right-wing communal mindset. Unquestionably, the British did encourage the development of a Muslim communal political identity as a counterweight to the growth of Congress nationalism. But this was only one of a complex web of strategies it employed. Moreover, the vast majority of Muslims, like their Hindu counterparts, were excluded from the political process and in no way benefited from the Raj's patronage. By contrast, one could, and many nationalists did, speak of an Anglo-Prince and Anglo-landlord alliance.

⁸² *Savarkar Writings*, 375-76.

The virulence of the Mahasabhites' anti-Muslim rhetoric has often blinded scholars to the socio-economic foundations of its politics and to the depth of its antipathy toward the Congress. The Mahasbha's Anglo-Hindu alliance was arguably directed as much against the Congress as the Muslim League. Events would demonstrate that the pursuit of genuine "Hindu politics" would cause Savarkar to support the suppression of the Quit India movement and in March 1943 the continued detention of Gandhi. But already in 1941, Jamnadas Mehta a close associate of Savarkar and the head of the Mahasabha-affiliated Democratic Swaraj Party had pronounced Gandhism "a greater danger to the real freedom of India than British imperialism."⁸³ As for the *Mahratta*, it held that any constitutional advancement in India during the previous twenty years had come "not because of the Congress, but rather in spite of it."⁸⁴

Admittedly not all Mahasabhites subscribed to all of these views or held them with the same vehemence. As the war progressed, Savarkar's policy of allying with the colonial regime was increasingly called into question. Nevertheless, Savarkar prevailed against his critics. Whilst the popular support for the Congress caused many Mahasabhites to flirt with the idea of launching their own direct action campaign, Savarkar succeeded in holding the Mahasabha to the position that no challenge should be made to the *Raj*'s constitution or legitimacy during the war.

Ultimately, it would be the British, for reasons that will be discussed later, who repudiated the alliance. The colonial authorities failed to invite even a single Mahasabhite to the conference they convened in Simla at the end of the war to discuss the

⁸³ *Hindu Outlook*, 16 September 1941. The *Outlook* defended Mehta's remarks, saying, "Gandhism is not merely nonsensical, but positively harmful to any nation wherever it may be preached."

⁸⁴ *Mahratta*, 27 September 1940.

establishment of an interim government comprised of representatives of India's political parties. And, adding insult to injury, the British, for their own purposes, cast the Congress in the role of the representative of Hindu India. Measured in terms of the Mahasabha's own war-times objectives, this was a devastating blow. Complained Andhran Mahasabhite G.V. Subba Rao, "After having received the support of Veer Savarkar and of the Hindu Sabha during the War, somehow the British Government thought it honourable and fair to let down the Sabha and seek an alliance with the Congress as their 'successor power' in residual India."⁸⁵

III. The Hindu Mahasabha's 1941 "Direct Action" Debate: From the threat at Madura to the "Epic Struggle" of Bhaglapur

The lengthy debate that the Mahasabha held in 1941 over whether to resort to direct action constituted the first real challenge to Savarkar's leadership. For a time, the Mahasabha President was thrust on the defensive. However, after Dacca and the surrounding district were convulsed by communal riots, S.P. Mookerjee and other key leaders of the Bengal Hindu Sabha dropped their support for a civil resistance campaign aimed at pressuring the *Raj*. Much as they deplored the loss of Hindu lives and property, the Bengal Mahasabhites saw the Dacca events as providing signs of a Hindu "awakening" that might be undercut if they incited the *Raj*'s displeasure. The Mahasabha's All-India Committee having effectively buried the direct action threat, Savarkar laid down an injunction: the Mahasabha should court communal confrontation with the Muslims, but mount no challenge to the *Raj* and its constitution, at least for the duration of the war. This and his enthusiastic endorsement of the July 1941 expansion of

⁸⁵ G.V. Subba Rao, *The Partition of India (1947)* (Amalapuram, Andhra Pradesh: Goshthi Book Trust, 1958) 46.

the Viceroy's Council caused some Mahasabhites to question Savarkar's policy, if not his nationalist bona fides. But the Mahasabha President soon found a means of mollifying his critics. Claiming Hindu honor was at stake, Savarkar led the Mahasabhites in defying a government order that prohibited the Mahasabha from holding its annual session in a communally-troubled district of Bihar. The following detailed examination of the Mahasabha's activities in 1941 further substantiates the link between the Mahasabha's pro-government orientation and the communal thrust of its politics.

The Mahasabha's direct action debate was precipitated by a Congress civil disobedience campaign in which activists challenged British authority by agitating against the war. In November 1940, shortly after the Congress launched its campaign, the Mahasabha Working Committee passed a resolution that condemned it for propagating the "vicious principal of non-violence." Savarkar, while expressing "sympathy" for those jailed and "appreciation of their patriotic motives," dismissed the Congress action as "sterile, unmanly and injurious to the Hindu cause."⁸⁶ The 1940-41 *satyagraha* was the least effective of the agitations led by Gandhi, "its purpose merely to register the Congress presence."⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the INC's defiance of the colonial authorities contrasted sharply with the stance of the Mahasabha, which had embraced the *Raj*'s "August Offer," then been reduced to pleading with the British to proceed with the promised reorganization of the Viceroy's Council.

For various reasons diverse elements in the Mahasabha pressed for the adoption of a more militant posture. Provincial elections were expected in 1941 and many Mahasabhite politicians feared they would fair poorly if they failed to show that

⁸⁶ *Hindu Outlook*, 30 November 1940; as cited in B. Chakrabarty, *Local Politics and Indian Nationalism: Midnapur 1919-1944* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1997) 24.

⁸⁷ Sarkar, *Modern India*, 381.

“Congress had not a monopoly on sacrifice.”⁸⁸ Moonje “informed me,” wrote a leading Delhi Mahasabhaite, “that he contemplated a jail-going programme on any possible issue ... [so as to bring] the Hindu Maha Sabha into [the] limelight as against the Congress.”⁸⁹ In Bengal, where the Mahasabha had recently emerged as a significant political force, there was great dissatisfaction among the Hindu middle class over the policies of the Muslim League-Krishak Praja Party coalition government. Hindu solidarity, argued S.P. Mookerjee, “can only grow as a result of some movement of resistance.”⁹⁰ Among the Mahasabha youth, who presumably represented a disproportionate share of its new recruits, support for direct action was the strongest. Not only did the youth have fewer family and professional obligations to deter them; they were, as Savarkar gingerly reminded them, novices in “Hindu politics.”⁹¹

In keeping with his policy of Hindu militarization and responsive cooperation, Savarkar opposed from the outset all calls for the Mahasabha to mount what he derisively termed “a counter-stunt” to the Congress civil disobedience campaign. The Mahasabha’s other leading Hindu nationalist ideologue was of a like mind. Parmanand’s *Hindu Outlook*, declared “Nations have never been built by pursuing policy of boycott or non-cooperation. Sensible alliance and wise co-operation do always build up the destinies of a race.”⁹²

In his presidential address to the Mahasabha’s December 1940 Madura session, Savarkar pointed to the incongruity in the Mahasabha voting to support the government

⁸⁸ NAI, GOI, Home Dept, File 180/41-Political (I).

⁸⁹ Harish Chandra to M.R. Jayakar, Jayakar Papers, File 709, Microfilm Box 123, U of Toronto.

⁹⁰ Mookerjee to Savarkar, 28 January 1941, as cited in Walter Andersen, “The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh-II,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, 18 March 1972: 636.

⁹¹ Savarkar, *Writings*, V. 6: 436-39.

⁹² Savarkar, *Writings*, V. 6: 436; *Hindu Outlook*, 14 April 1941.

war effort and form Hindu militarization boards while simultaneously threatening direct action. The Mahasabha, said Savarkar, "cannot do the two things at one and the same time ... You cannot both eat and have the cake." Reaffirming his commitment to a Mahasabha-government alliance, Savarkar implored the Mahasabhites not to pursue a course that "will directly prove detrimental to our first and greater objective."⁹³ The perception that the colonial authorities had "slighted" the Mahasabha, added Savarkar, was erroneous: "The government has in fact met the demands put forward by the Hindu Mahasabha at the outbreak of the war in a substantial measure."⁹⁴

Opposing Savarkar were a cross-section of Mahasabha leaders, new and old, led by Moonje, V.G. Deshpande and the Bengalis, S.P. Mookerjee and N.C. Chatterjee. Like their Mahasabhite brethren, the Bengalis criticized the British for failing to satisfy India's demand for home rule, but their zeal was rooted in the political dynamics of their home province: their antipathy toward the Muslim League-KPP ministry, and the three-cornered competition between the Mahasabha, the official Congress, and Subhas Chandra Boses's Forward Bloc for *bhadralok* support. Mookerjee told the session he had always opposed direct action and civil disobedience and even now believed in responsive co-operation, but the Muslim ministries "were out to cripple nationalism and the legitimate interests of the Hindus."⁹⁵

The Madura direct action resolution exemplifies the Mahasabha's *mélange* of Indian and Hindu nationalist appeals, while also indicating the true hierarchy in its priorities. The first of the resolution's sixteen paragraphs thanked the Viceroy and Secretary of State for recognizing the Mahasabha as a key political player. The second

⁹³ *Savarkar Writings*, 435-36.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 438.

⁹⁵ *IAR*, II, 1940: 275-81.

chastized the British for refusing to pledge to give India Dominion status within a year of the war's end and for failing to make India an equal partner in an "Indo-British Commonwealth of Nations." Thereafter, the resolution, especially the conditional clauses motivating the demand for direct action, focussed almost exclusively on the colonial administration's "anti-Hindu policy" and purported collusion in the suppression of the Hindus of the Muslim-majority provinces. The *Raj* was condemned for not having heeded the Mahasabha's calls, suspended the constitution, and placed Bengal under Governor's rule for the duration of the war. Given its social composition and right-wing politics, the Mahasabha would not and could not indict the *Raj* for sustaining landlordism and princely rule. But it is significant, that at a time when Indian political discourse, including the Muslim League's, increasingly invoked social justice, social equality and development, the Mahasabha resolution made no mention of the socio-economic plight of India's masses. Nor did it demand universal suffrage.⁹⁶

The Madura resolution threatened to derail Savarkar's efforts to get Mahasabha representation on the Viceroy's Council. Nonetheless, it was in keeping with Mahasabha "tradition" in that it criticized British rule principally from the standpoint of the *Raj*'s "pro-Muslim bias" and promoted the Mahasabha as the sole legitimate political representative of India's Hindus. The truly important thing, argued Mookerjee, was not "immediate success" in the form of a change in government policy, but the communal-political mobilization of the Hindus. "Uptil [sic] now all big national struggles have had no direct connection with the cause of the Hindus as such."⁹⁷

⁹⁶ For the full text of the resolution see the *Mahratta*, 10 January 1941.

⁹⁷ Mookerjee to Savarkar 28 January 1941, as cited in Walter Andersen, "The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh-II," 636.

Ultimately, only a handful of the 2,000 delegates at the Mahasabha's Madura session voted against threatening the government with direct action in three months. Anticipating such an outcome, Savarkar downplayed his dissent before polling the audience. He did not believe, he told the Mahasabha faithful, that anything in his presidential address could be construed as going against the resolution. Yet Savarkar also made sure to place on record that the Mahasabha had yet to determine the tactics it would employ were it to resort to direct action. And, soon after the delegates dispersed, he issued a statement insisting that any direct action campaign should not run counter to the Mahasabha's war policy—something, as he himself had argued in his Madura address, that was impossible if the campaign was to have substance.⁹⁸

The Madura session stipulated that the colonial authorities had till March 31 to meet the Mahasabha's demands or face direct action. But when the Working Committee convened in early March there was little discussion about a potential Mahasabha challenge to British authority. The Committee shunted any decision on direct action to a meeting slated for mid-April, while strengthening the Mahasabha's support for the British war effort through the establishment of an all-India Hindu Militarization Board. The April meeting put off any decision on direct action for a further two months, ostensibly because Savarkar was still corresponding with the Viceroy about the Mahasabha's demands. As the new, June deadline approached, the Maharashtran Mahasabhites floated the idea of an anti-British commercial boycott, arguing that it would be "suicidal" for the Mahasabha to adopt a "programme of seeking jails [sic] and imprisonments [sic] in the futile Congressite fashion on a mass scale."⁹⁹ By now the colonial authorities had come

⁹⁸ *JAR*, II, 1940: 282; Savarkar, *Whirlwind*, 291.

⁹⁹ NAI, GOI, Home Dept, File 180/41-Political (I).

to appreciate the strength of Savarkar's commitment to an alliance with the *Raj*.

Commented a Home Department Official, "An ingenious escape by Savarkar from his cleft stick. The fact that the device meets the terms of the Madura resolution without involving jail should make it easy of acceptance."¹⁰⁰ In fact, the boycott proposal excited much opposition from the UP Hindu Sabhas and especially from the many Mahasabhites who hailed from Cawnpore's vibrant business community.¹⁰¹

Meeting in Calcutta in mid-June, the Mahasabha's Working Committee and then its All-India Committee decisively rejected any form of direct action, even a commercial boycott. The Mahasabhites termed the government's response to their demands "evasive, unsatisfactory and disappointing." Yet, by a crushing majority of 51 votes (61-10), the All-India Committee postponed direct action "indefinitely" and, by a similar lopsided margin, denied provincial Hindu Sabhas the right to mount their own direct action campaigns. Rather than challenge the *Raj*, the Mahsabaha implored Hindus to ready themselves to meet external and Muslim aggression. However, it left no doubt as to which was the greater menace. The "paramount duty of Hindus," declared the Mahasabha's Calcutta resolution, was "to resist and crush" Muslim aggression. While rejecting a *swadeshi* boycott of British goods, the Mahasabha renewed its call for a "buy Hindu" campaign, thus making Muslim artisans and traders, not British commercial interests, its target.¹⁰²

Those who had led the charge at Madura in December—Moonje, Mookerjee and N.C. Chatterjee—were precisely those who were the most conspicuous in urging the

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *UP Weekly Intelligence Abstract*, 6 June 1941; *Hindu Outlook*, 24 June 1941.

¹⁰² *Hindu Outlook*, 24 June and 1 July, 1941; NAI, GOI, Home Dept, File 180/41-Political (I).

Mahasabha to forswear any anti-British mobilization and focus on promoting Hindu communal consciousness and martial training. Through informers, the British learned that

in refuting opposition arguments [Mookerjee] drew attention to recent communal riots which indicated well-organised campaign of oppression against Hindus and attempt to force them to accept Pakistan; he suggested that present attention should be concentrated on consolidating Hindus to ensure security of their homes...¹⁰³

The Mahasabha's aboutface did not surprise the more astute contemporary observers. Nor should it surprise us. The Mahasabha lacked a tradition of challenging the *Raj*, had been reared on opposition to Gandhian civil disobedience, and had increasingly become the vehicle for landlord and big business opposition to the Congress, largely because of its cooperation with the *Raj*. That the Mahasabha flirted with direct action—subsequent Mahasabha sessions would adopt resolutions similar to the Madura one and they too would come to nothing—is testimony to the radical tenor of the times, the depth of anti-British feeling among the Hindu middle class, and the pressures on the Mahasabha as it tried to assert an independent political identity. The more the Mahasabha succeeded in becoming a mass organization, the more it faced the challenge of proving itself a worthy protagonist of the Congress.

Although unsurprising, the Mahasabha's shelving of its Madura resolution proved to be important in defining its relations to the *Raj*, the Congress and the communal-political struggle. In retrospect, S.P. Mookerjee held that the Mahasabha's failure to carry out its direct action pledge punctured its bubbling popular support: "The withdrawal of the Madura resolution was a severe blow on the prestige of the Mahasabha, and made people feel that we could only talk big and ran away from the field of action."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ NAI, GOI, Home Dept, File 180/41-Political (I).

¹⁰⁴ Syama Prasad Mookerjee, *Leaves from a Diary*, (Calcutta: OUP, 1993) 43-44.

Invariably, the Mahasabha's critics pointed to the fate of its aborted 1941 direct action campaign as proof of its reactionary, pro-British character.¹⁰⁵

From all that has gone before, it should be abundantly clear that the Mahasabha's abandonment of direct action was rooted in its social composition and basic orientation and not a mere response to immediate events. Closer examination of the Dacca events is warranted, however, for they shed light on the politics of the Bengal Hindu Sabha, an increasingly important force in the all-India organization.

The 1941 Dacca Riots and Hindu "Resistance": For two months, beginning March 18, Dacca and the surrounding countryside were convulsed by communal disturbances. Recent scholarship has confirmed the contemporary view that the 1941 Dacca "riot" was unlike previous communal eruptions in Bengal.¹⁰⁶ The savagery of the violence was unprecedented. There was much evidence of planning, co-ordination, and leadership and of the involvement of the cadres of political organizations. Whereas in previous disturbances in east Bengal Muslim, rioters had principally targeted upper-class Hindus, often *zamindars* and money-lenders notorious for their oppressive demands, in the 1941 Dacca riot the element of subaltern revolt was submerged in a general campaign of violence directed against all Hindus. According to the author of a study of riots in pre-Partition Bengal, "One phase of rioting was giving way to another; expressions of national and class identity were replaced by mass action strongly expressing communal cohesion and hatred of the other community."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ "[N]either the [Muslim] League nor the Mahasabha has to its credit a single act of resistance to the foreign government," charged the Congress Socialists Ashok Mehta and Achyut Patwardhan. See Ashok Mehta and Achyut Patwardhan, *The Communal Triangle in India* (Allahabad: Kitabistan, 1942) 163-64.

¹⁰⁶ Suranjan Das, *Communal Riots in Bengal 1905-1947* (Delhi: OUP, 1991); Patricia A. Grossman, *Riots and Victims: Violence and the Construction of Communal Identity among Bengali Muslims, 1905-4*, (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1999).

¹⁰⁷ Suranjan Das, 159.

As a protagonist of communal political struggle, the Bengal Hindu Mahasabha played a pivotal role before, during, and after the Dacca disturbances, and at both the local and provincial levels. Bengal's League-KPP ministry pursued an aggressive communal agenda, employing various populist initiatives to consolidate support among the better-off sections of the Muslim peasantry. The Mahasabhites responded in kind, charging "the Hindu race is being strangled to death—economically, politically and culturally!"¹⁰⁸ In answer to the Bengal ministry's attempt to ensure effective Muslim communal-political control of the province's Education Department, Mookerjee raised the demand for separate Hindu and Muslim school systems funded from the taxes of the respective communities.¹⁰⁹ Blinded by communal and class prejudice, Mookerjee invoked the fact that 80 percent of Bengal's students were Hindus (although they constituted barely 40 percent of the province's population) not to condemn the prevailing social order and call for a policy aimed at providing education for all, including the sons and daughters of the province's illiterate majority, but as proof that the Hindu middle-class merited its own education system.¹¹⁰

In the months leading up to the Dacca riot, the Mahasabhites mounted a full-throttled agitation against the League-KPP ministry. They demanded the Governor sack the ministry and assume full charge of the provincial government, while urging Hindus to obtain martial training, by joining the army, the Bengal Mahasabha's Hindu Sakthi Sangha or local akharas, so as to ready themselves to thwart any "Muslim aggression." In Bengal and across India, the Mahasabha conducted a major campaign around the 1941

¹⁰⁸ As cited in Joya Chatterjee, *Bengal Divided*, 136.

¹⁰⁹ In promoting this proposal, veteran Mahasabhite Radha Kumud Mookerjee observed that in another part of the British Empire, the Canadian province of Quebec, the two main religious communities already possessed autonomous school systems funded by separate tax rolls.

¹¹⁰ S.P. Mookerjee, *Leaves from a Diary*, 45.

decennial census. Hindus were implored to spurn Congress appeals to boycott the census and to maximize their census numbers so Hindus could secure their “rightful share” of legislative and local board seats and public service jobs.¹¹¹ Accusing the Hindu elite of engaging in “chicanery, perjury and falsehood in order to deflate the Muslim position,” Bengal Premier Fazul Huq warned his Hindu communal opponents that they were paving the road to Pakistan.¹¹²

Local Mahasabha leaders were implicated in the Dacca riots. Rioters shouted pro- and anti-Hindu Mahasabha slogans.¹¹³ At the height of the disturbances, the British Deputy Commissioner tried to prevent Mookerjee from entering Dacca, for, as Mookerjee boasted, “I was like a red rag to the [Muslim] bull ...” While in Dacca, Mookerjee met with Muslim leaders to press for a joint effort to re-establish order. But the relief campaign he spearheaded provided aid exclusively to Hindu victims and was accompanied by a drive to organize “Hindu self-defence.” Mookerjee’s own account of his Dacca trip concludes on a triumphant note: in Dacca town “the Hindus could not be beaten.”¹¹⁴ After the riots ceased, the Mahasabhites championed an anti-Muslim economic boycott that kept Dacca’s communal wounds raw.¹¹⁵

At several other points in this dissertation we will have cause to consider the development of the Bengal Hindu Mahasabha and the differences that developed between its foremost leader, Mookerjee, and Savarkar. Suffice it to say here, that Mookerjee’s political strategy was very much rooted in Bengal’s dynamic as a Muslim-majority

¹¹¹ Eg. *Hindu Outlook*, 7 December 1941, and 25 February, and 4 and 18 March, 1941.

¹¹² As cited in Suranjan Das: 143-44.

¹¹³ Suranjan Das: 148, 155, 158 and 211.

¹¹⁴ S.P. Mookerjee, *Leaves from a Diary*: 39-40; Balraj Madhok, *Portrait of a Martyr: Biography of Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerji*, 1969 Edition (Bombay: Jaico Publishing, 1969) 31-32.

¹¹⁵ Sarunjan Das, 157.

province. Mookerjee strove to make the Mahasabha the principal political organization of Bengal's Hindus, while simultaneously pressing for a pan-Hindu communal front uniting it with the Congress, and the Forward Bloc of Sarat Chandra Bose against the *bhadralok's* Muslim communal-political rivals.

In the spring of 1941 Mookerjee and his associates had reason to believe that their complex dual objective was being realized. The Dacca communal convulsion, recalled Mookerjee in his diary, "opened the eyes of the Hindus considerably and the work of the Sabha received a great impetus."¹¹⁶ In Dacca, middle class Hindus were reported to have shown "a definite tendency to close their ranks and unite under the shelter of the Hindu Mahasabha to combat any attack, political or otherwise, from Muslim quarters."¹¹⁷

According to a British intelligence report from early April,

The position of the Bengal Congress has further weakened and the Hindu Mahasava [*sic*] has gained in strength owing to the unfortunate communal riot at Dacca and strong communal tension in some other districts. Almost every person is found reluctant to pay in the 'Relief Fund' opened by Congress but are voluntarily paying to the fund opened by the Hindu Mahasaba ...¹¹⁸

Unable to compete with the Mahasabha's communally-organized relief effort, the Congress leadership soon decided to follow the Mahasabha's example and pledge to give assistance only to Hindus.¹¹⁹ Further proof of the Mahasabha's new prominence was provided by the by-election for the Bengal Assembly's North Bengal General Municipal

¹¹⁶ S.P. Mookerjee, *Leaves from a Diary*, 40.

¹¹⁷ As cited in Gossman, 127.

¹¹⁸ As cited in Joya Chatterjee, *Bengal Divided*, 141.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 141-42. Chatterjee cites a letter from Rajendra Prasad to Gandhi, justifying this capitulation: "If Congress cannot be of any help to the public at this critical time, then it may lose its hold on the public."

constituency. On May 13, veteran Mahasabhaite Ashutosh Lahiri captured the constituency with more than 80% of the popular vote.¹²⁰

Concurrent with the surge in Mahasabha support there were increasing instances of Mahasabha-Congress collaboration. Under pressure from the Mahasabha's agitation against the Secondary Education Bill, the Congress walked out of the legislature to protest the Bill and much of the Congress and Forward Bloc lent their support to the Mahasabha-led campaign for the creation of a Hindu education board. So as to ensure the "Hindu case" prevailed before the Dacca Riot Enquiry Committee, the Mahasabha and Congress cooperated in the collection and presentation of evidence.¹²¹

In January, Mookerjee had advocated a Mahasabha direct action campaign on the grounds that Hindu solidarity could only grow "as a result of some movement of resistance." If in June, he opposed the Mahasabha initiating direct action, it was at least in part because he saw the Mahasabha's mobilization around the Dacca riots and against the League-KPP Ministry as representing the beginnings of Hindu resistance. It was only necessary that Hindus learn the lessons of Dacca:

For Hindus the incidents have a value of their own. ... the Hindus must remember that it will be impossible for them to protect their lives, honour and property unless they make up their minds to stand united. There must be a complete social reconstruction so as to bind together all sections of Hindus irrespective of castes into one homogeneous whole ... Where such unity existed, courage and tenacity followed as a matter of course. ... Along with Hindu consolidation there must come a determination to act without fear in self-defence whenever occasion demands it. ... The law gives us this right and let us cultivate the habit ... of boldly exercising this right.¹²²

¹²⁰ *Hindu Outlook*, 27 May 1941.

¹²¹ S.P. Mookerjee, *Leaves from a Diary*, 44-45; J. Chatterjee, *Bengal Divided*, 140-43; Sarunjan Das, 158.

¹²² "Statement by Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee, Working President, All-India Hindu Mahasabha," Moonje Papers, File 60.

Savarkar and the *Raj*: The Mahasabha's aboutface on direct action was much derided in the pro-Congress press. Stung by this criticism, Savarkar issued a "clarification" of the resolution that the Mahasabha's All-India Committee had adopted at its Calcutta meeting—a clarification that made the Mahasabha's communal and pro-government thrust even more transparent.¹²³

The Mahasabha President denied his organization had renounced or even postponed direct action. If direct action was understood not as "jail-seeking," but from the proper Mahasabhite perspective of "resistance to aggression offered in such a wise as to inflict a deterrent punishment on the wrong doer," then the Mahasabhites were already mounting it. Whenever Hindus had been the target of Muslim aggression "who came forward to bear the brunt of the struggle" by organizing "self-defence?" All the Mahasabha had done at Calcutta, asserted Savarkar, was make a strategic decision to forego a confrontation with the *Raj* over India's colonial status. The Calcutta resolution "sanctioned and recommended" direct action "in defence of immediate Hindu interests." All it prohibited was a challenge to the colonial regime: Direct Action in connection with All-India constitutional demands.

* * *

In the spring and summer of 1941, the Axis powers made impressive gains overrunning Yugoslavia and Greece and launching an initially very successful invasion of the USSR. Britain's deteriorating strategic position caused the colonial authorities to renew their efforts to associate Indian political leaders with the war effort. To this end, Linlithgow announced the enlargement of the Viceroy's Council from 7 to 12 members, the Indian element rising from 3 to 8, and the formation of a National Defence Council

¹²³ The full text of Savarkar's statement can be found in *Hindu Outlook*, 8 July 1941.

(NDC). These changes were meant to reinforce the *Raj*'s ties with the princes, Hindu Mahasabhis, (Punjabi) Unionists, Liberals and others who had given unequivocal support to the British war effort, but most of the non-Congress political elite dismissed them as cosmetic, since the British kept all the key ministries—Finance, Home and Defence. Savarkar, by contrast issued a statement titled “Breach effected in the central citadel of bureaucracy” that welcomed the changes as a “step in the right direction.”¹²⁴ One reason for Savarkar’s enthusiasm was that, unlike the preceding fall, the British had not let lack of Congress and Muslim League support deter them from acting. Another was that the *Raj* had seen fit to reward a number of Mahasabhis and Mahasabha supporters with the seats on the NDC.¹²⁵ These included Sir J.P. Srivastava, Ramrao Madhavrao Deshmukh, and Jamnadas Mehta. Although no Mahasabhi was elevated to the Viceroy’s Council, an old Maharashtran Tilakite and longtime Mahasabha ally—M.S. Aney—was.¹²⁶

Savarkar’s stand was implicitly criticized by S.P. Mookerjee and publicly questioned by Ramanada Chatterjee, the influential editor of the *Modern Review* and a past President of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha. “I believe Savarkar has gone almost to dangerous lengths in his advocacy of cooperation,” complained veteran Mahasabhi B. Bannerji.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Savarkar, *Whirlwind*, 452-56.

¹²⁵ The National Defence Council generally rates a mention in histories of the period only because Muslim League President M.A. Jinnah forced the Premiers of Bengal and the Punjab to give up their NDC seats. Nonetheless, the British considered it a significant innovation as it was the first government body to include representatives of both British and Princely India. Secretary of State Amery even floated the idea of making the NDC the nucleus of a post-war constitution-making body. V.P. Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1957) 169.

¹²⁶ Aney had become the leader of the Congress Nationalist Party, when old-age and ill-health forced Malaviya into retirement. In 1940, many Mahasabhis supported Aney’s initiative in founding a Hindu Nationalist League, later renamed the Nationalist League so as not to compete with the Mahasabha.

¹²⁷ B. Bannerji to M.R. Jayakar, 14 September 1941, Jayakar Papers, File 709, Microfilm Box 123, U of T.

The Bhagalpur Struggle: A challenge to the Raj or a feint? Mahasabhites' doubts about Savarkar's policy were quieted by his leadership of the December 1941 "Bhagalpur struggle"—a short-lived civil disobedience campaign. Braving mass arrests and *lathi*-charges, the Mahasabhites defied a Bihar government order, issued under the Defence of India Act, that barred them from holding their annual session at Bhagalpur around the time of the Muslim festival of *Id*. For Savarkar, the Bhagalpur civil resistance campaign had a three-fold purpose: to justify his continued leadership of the Mahasabha; to refurbish the Mahasabha's anti-British credentials; and to identify the assertion of Hindu civic and religious rights with opposition to the *Raj*.

In the main, political India considered the prohibition on the Mahasabha holding its session in Bhagalpur and five other Bihar districts between December 1 and January 10 unwarranted and provocative. Local Mahasabhites had been implicated in communal strife in years past, but neither the Muslim League nor Bhagalpur's Muslims had asked for such a ban.

Savarkar agreed to the session being moved forward a few days so it no longer coincided with *Id*, but argued any other concession would make the Mahasabha complicit with the British in "putting a premium on goondaism."¹²⁸ On Savarkar's initiative, the Mahasabha devoted considerable resources and energy to its Bhagalpur civil resistance campaign and its efforts were rewarded. Tens of thousands rallied in Bhagalpur on December 22, the day the session had been slated to begin. Over the next three days, the Mahasabhites staged meetings and protests across the six districts included in the ban.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ *IAR*, II, 1940,; 236.

¹²⁹ *Hindu Outlook*, 23 December 1941; Indra Prakash, *Hindu Mahasabha: Its Contribution to India's Politics*, (New Delhi: Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha, 1966) 73-75.

The government authorities had made, in the words of the Bhagalpur District Magistrate, “extensive police arrangements” to suppress the Mahasabha civil resistance campaign.¹³⁰ Beginning on the night of December 16, police raided Mahasabha offices and rounded up local Mahasabha leaders. The Bhagalpur Magistrate reported 561 arrests between December 23 and 27. Savarkar and Mookerjee claimed the true total, when one took into account those detained prior to reaching Bhagalpur, numbered in the thousands. While the Hindu Mahasabhites were prone to exaggeration, it is indisputable that the police arrested the vast majority of nationally-known Mahasabhites and most provincial leaders, including Savarkar, Parmanand, S.P. Mookerjee, Sir Gokulchand Narang, Moonje, V.G. Deshpande, N.C. Chatterjee, Ashutosh Lahiri, Raja Maheshwar Dayal, and Mehr Chand Khanna.¹³¹

The *Raj* could ill afford to turn a blind eye to an all-India political party defying an order issued under the Defence of India Act. The *Raj*’s anxiety and displeasure was amplified by the Mahasabha’s timing—it mounted its direct action movement only days after the war had taken an alarming new turn with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Nonetheless, the colonial authorities had acquired considerable political sophistication and could well recognize the civil disobedience campaign for what it was—a nuisance, rather than a real challenge to their authority. Many of those arrested were released the same day and all those remaining in custody were freed on January 5.¹³²

Savarkar, for his part, made sure that the British could not misinterpret the Mahasabha’s purpose. In his Bhagalpur presidential address, he reiterated the

¹³⁰ “Report on the Hindu Mahasabha session ban—E.T. Prideaux (District Magistrate)”, L/P&J/8/683.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*; *Hindu Outlook*, 23 December 1941; *Mahratta*, 25 December 1941 and 16 January 1943; Prakash, *Hindu Mahasabha: Its Contribution*, 73-75; Mookerjee, *Diary*, 53.

¹³² Prakash, *Hindu Mahasabha: Its Contribution*, 75.

Mahasabha's support for the war effort and the government. "I must make it clear," he declared, Mahasabhites" have defied the ban "not with the least desire to throw a challenge to the Government or to flout the legitimate authority in any wanton manner."¹³³ At the end of the four-days originally allotted for the session, G.V. Ketkar, the "last dictator" of the Mahasabha direct action campaign, announced its immediate end and instructed all Mahasabhites to return home and cease all protests.¹³⁴

Savarkar, in his balance sheet of the Bhagalpur resistance movement, exalted in its having united Hindus of different regions and religious beliefs and across caste and class lines: "Rajas and Rishis, Millionaires and millhands, ... Princes and Peasants, the Touchables and untouchables ... did actualise through the struggle as never before our Racial, Cultural, and Political homogeneity. We Hindus have truly recovered our National self."¹³⁵ Such boasts notwithstanding, the situation on the ground was much more complex. The Bhagalpur campaign had been facilitated by support from rival organizations, including the Congress, who viewed the Bihar government ban as a serious violation of civil liberties. More significantly, Savarkar's claim that "the struggle was fought out in defence of Hindu Rights as Hindu Rights, and under the unalloyed Hindu Colours" was contradicted by the actions of the crowd.¹³⁶ The Bhagalpur protestors largely eschewed Hindu Mahasabha slogans, for purely nationalist ones. The reaction of the bazaar crowd likely came as a surprise to the Mahasabha leaders, reported the

¹³³ *Savarkar Writings*, 446-47.

¹³⁴ *Mahratta*, 2 January 1942.

¹³⁵ Savarkar, "When Hindus made history at Bhagalpur. Review of the Mahasabha's 23rd Annual Session," *Mahratta*, 16 January 1942.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

Bhagalpur District Magistrate, since anti-British and anti-government cries often drowned out the strictly Mahasabhite ones.¹³⁷

The Bhagalpur direct action campaign galvanized the Mahasabha, gave it a new veneer of nationalist militancy, and quickly came to be incorporated into Mahasabha lore.¹³⁸ But for Savarkar, the respite would prove short-lived. Japan's stunning military victories and the increasing strain placed on India's economy and polity by the demands of war soon produced a new crisis in Indian-Anglo relations. Come August 1942, it would be far more difficult for Savarkar and the Mahasabha to finesse their support for the *Raj*.

¹³⁷ "Report on the Hindu Mahasabha session ban ...", See also Jaffrelot, Dissertation, 401-402.

¹³⁸ The Mahasabha's official history titles its account of the Bhagalpur civil resistance campaign, "The Epic Story of Bhagalpur." See Prakash, *Hindu Mahasabha: Its Contribution*, 73.

Chapter 4: The Hindu Mahasabha and the Quit India Movement

Japan's December 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor and subsequent rapid advance through south-east Asia plunged India into the center of the World War II maelstrom. The threat of a Japanese invasion, the increasing economic dislocation and hardship produced by the British war effort, and the growing U.S. interest and involvement in an India whose defence was pivotal to the Allied cause in China, the Soviet Union, and the Middle East greatly intensified India's political and social crisis. The first eight months of 1942 saw a series of political shifts and shocks that culminated in the arrest of the Congress leadership and the eruption of what Viceroy Linlithgow himself described as the greatest challenge to British rule since the Mutiny of 1857.¹

This chapter will document Savarkar's attempts to maintain and deepen the Mahasabha's alliance with the *Raj* in the run-up to the Quit India rebellion. In April 1942 the Mahasabha reiterated its readiness to serve in government. In July, as the *Raj* braced itself for a showdown with the Congress, UP Hindu Sabha leader and All-India Mahasabha Working Committee member Sir J.P. Srivastava was named to the Viceroy's Council. Savarkar labelled the Congress Working Committee's impending Quit India agitation a graver threat to the Hindu cause than the *Khilafat* movement; then condemned the turbulent popular reaction to the INC's suppression as "hooliganism." Convinced of the Mahasabha's loyalty, an embattled Viceroy Linlithgow briefly flirted with the notion of building a "popular" government round the Mahasabha.

Savarkar, however, could not entirely insulate the Mahasabha from the discontent affecting broad layers of Indian society. A few Mahasabhite leaders wanted their

¹ Linlithgow to Churchill, 31 August 1942, *TOP*, 2: 853.

organization to ally with the Congress; many more, while condemning Gandhi for stoking social unrest, believed that their organization had become too closely associated with the colonial regime. This chapter will examine the crisis that the INC's clash with the *Raj* provoked in the Mahasabha. Particular attention will be given to the Bengal Mahasabha's less adversarial stance toward the Congress-initiated movement.

The Mahasabha and the Cripps Offer

Under pressure from the Roosevelt administration and the Labourites in his own war cabinet, Churchill agreed in March 1942 to a new initiative to rally India to the Allied cause. Sir Stafford Cripps was dispatched to New Delhi to present Indian political leaders with a scheme for immediate party representation on the Viceroy's Council and for India's accession to Dominion status once the war was won. What Cripps did not tell those whom he met, including a Mahasabha delegation led by Savarkar, was that the fine print of the non-negotiable offer was the subject of bitter dispute at the very apex of the British and British Indian governments.² Cripps was no doubt sincere in his attempt to reconcile Britain's imperial interests with Indian nationalism. But for Churchill, and even for those like Secretary of State Amery and Viceroy Linlithgow who considered themselves reformers, the Cripps' mission was a gesture mounted more to placate U.S. and British public opinion than Indian.³ The Cripps Offer—and this was further underlined by a tussle with the Congress over whether an Indian could assume the Defence portfolio—kept power in the here and now firmly in British hands. Whilst the

² Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 120-21 and 135-36; Johannes Voigt, *India in the Second World War* (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1987) 121-22.

³ In justifying the choice of Cripps as British emissary, Secretary of State Amery told the Viceroy, "From the point of view of putting across what is essentially a Conservative policy, both as regards the future and as regards the immediate refusal to transfer control of the Executive, there is much to be said for sending out someone who has always been an extreme Left Winger and in close touch with Nehru and the Congress." (*TOP*, 1: 402.)

Offer did make unprecedented pledges about India's power to chart its own constitutional destiny in a post-war world, its tail contained what for Indian and Hindu nationalists alike was a deadly sting: the existing British Indian provinces, and by inference the princely states, were to be given the right to opt out of the new Indian state and form one or more separate Dominions. Never before had a government proposal provided for British India (as opposed to the princely states) evolving into anything other than a single federation.⁴ All of India's principal political parties rejected the Cripps Offer, but they did so for different reasons. The Mahasabha's objections revolved round the communal power struggle.⁵ It condemned the newly-contrived right of provincial self-determination, charging that the British were providing Jinnah with a constitutional mechanism to realize Pakistan. "The Mahasabha," affirmed its Working Committee, "cannot be true to itself and to the best interests of Hindusthan (India) if it is a party to any proposal which involves the political partition of India in any shape or form."⁶ The Mahasabha also took exception to the proposed post-war Constituent Assembly being elected by the provincial legislatures after fresh elections. Under the 1935 India Act, only a small fraction of all adult Indians had the right to vote. But for the Mahasabha the exclusion of the vast majority from the constitution-making process was no cause for concern. Its objection was that the Communal Award inflated the number of Muslim legislators.

The Mahasabha criticized the Cripps Offer for leaving the Viceroy's vast legislative and reserve powers untouched pending the post-war constitutional negotiations and denounced the British for refusing to name an Indian Defence Minister. But these criticisms were belied by the Mahasabha's readiness to enter the government in defiance of the

⁴ A.I. Singh, 77. On the Cripps' Offer see Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, Chapter V.

⁵ TOP, 1: 627-629.

⁶ TOP, 1: 628.

Congress and Muslim League and without any change in either the letter or spirit of the Viceroy's powers.

The Congress Working Committee (CWC) also deplored the threat that a provincial right of self-determination represented to Indian unity. But, to the Mahasabha's chagrin, the CWC added that it "cannot think in terms of compelling the people in any territorial unit to remain in an Indian Union against their declared and established will." Another key reason that the Congress rejected the British scheme for a post-war transfer of power was that the Cripps Offer gave the princes complete freedom to choose the princely states' delegates to the Constituent Assembly.⁷ The Mahasabha, by contrast, voiced no objection to the princes having the unfettered right to determine their states' representatives. This was in keeping with the Mahasabha's policy of upholding princely-rule against Congress or Communist inspired movements for democratic and socio-economic reform. It also serves to illustrate that on some key issues the Mahasabha and Muslim League were aligned. The League, which had its own hopes of forging an anti-Congress bloc with the princes, not only failed to demand that the people of the princely states be represented in the Constituent Assembly by their elected representatives; it criticized the British for not expressly stipulating that the princely states also had an inherent right of self-determination.⁸

Although the CWC formally rejected the Cripps Offer on April 2, Congress President A.K. Azad and J. Nehru continued to negotiate with the British emissary for another eight days in the hopes that they could find common ground on the proposal for an interim national government. Cripps later reported to the War Cabinet that as these

⁷ TOP, 1: 745-48.

⁸ TOP, 1: 750. On the League's attitude to the States, see Ian Copland, "The Princely States, the Muslim League and the Partition of India in 1947," *The International History Review*, 13 (1991): 38-69.

discussions proceeded he became aware that Congress leaders were most anxious that the Mahasabha be included in the interim ministry, fearing otherwise that “they would be open to attack by the Hindu Mahasabha” for having “sacrificed Hindu interests to a dangerous degree . . .”⁹ Cripps then solicited the Bombay Governor’s aid in sounding out Savarkar on this. When the Mahasabha President met Governor Lumley on April 9, he was at pains to demonstrate the Mahasabha’s eagerness to join the government. Should an all-party government be formed, the Mahasabha would participate, so long as in so doing it did not have to endorse the entire Cripps Offer and the ratio of Hindus on the Viceroy’s Council was “more or less proportionate to the strength of the Hindus [in the population at large.]” Should the scheme for a national government fail, the Mahasabha, Savarkar insisted, still wanted to join the government. According to one account, Savarkar proclaimed himself personally ready to serve as one of Linlithgow’s Councillors.¹⁰

Shortly thereafter, Cripps’ negotiations with the Congress collapsed due to the British insistence that the Defence Minister’s key responsibilities remain in the hands of the Commander-in-Chief of the British Indian Army and the British refusal to allow any limits on the Viceroy’s powers. Before leaving for London, Cripps advised Linlithgow that he thought the Muslim League and the Mahasabha could now be induced into joining an expanded and reorganized Viceroy’s Council.¹¹ Thus once again, the Viceroy explored the possibility of reorganizing his Council by including on it official League and Mahasabha representatives. Linlithgow had no doubts as to the Mahasabha’s eagerness to enter government. Jinnah, however, proved as intractable as ever. When Linlithgow

⁹ *TOP*, 2: 335.

¹⁰ *Mahratta* 17 April 1942; *India Year Book*, 1943-44, 835; *TOP*, 2: 335

¹¹ *TOP*, 1: 761.

approached him through an intermediary, the Muslim League President indicated he would insist that the League be given a majority of the Council seats (8 of a proposed 15).¹² The British were thus forced to continue to temporize, and the Mahasabhis were again left at the antechamber of the Viceroy's Council, their hopes of being brought into government and officially allied with the *Raj* effectively dashed by the Muslim League.

Britain's readiness to countenance India's disunion shocked the Mahasabhis and impelled them to intensify their anti-Pakistan agitation. In this they found a receptive ally in the Sikh Akali Dal and other more conservative Sikh political groupings. While Savarkar's claim of an anti-Cripps "Hindu-Sikh Pact" was probably more boast than fact, Mahasabha and Sikh leaders did mount joint meetings and rallies and laid plans for an All-India Anti-Pakistan Conference.¹³ Invited to Amritsar by Master Tara Singh, veteran Mahasabhi B.S. Moonje told a joint meeting of Hindus and Sikhs, that "Congress politics is dominated by Mussalmans." As proof, he pointed to the fact that the Congress delegation then negotiating with Cripps was led by its President, the Muslim A.K. Azad.¹⁴ For his part, Mahasabha President Savarkar raised the slogan "Hindusthan for the Hindus" and proclaimed Hindus ready to meet Muslims in a civil war.¹⁵ The Mahasabha changed the name of its annual May 10th celebration of the outbreak of the 1857 Mutiny from "Independence Day" to "Anti-Pakistan Day." Reflecting the Mahasabha's priorities and political proximity to the *Raj*, its Anti-Pakistan Day resolution referred to the struggle for political independence only as a long-term objective and ideal. The prospect of an imminent clash with the colonial regime was raised only as a consequence of the Hindu-Muslim

¹² Linlithgow to SS 14 April, 1942, *TOP*, 1; *TOP*, 1: 761-62.

¹³ *Mahratta*, 17 April, 8 May, and 17 July 1942.

¹⁴ *Mahratta*, 17 April 1942.

¹⁵ *Leader*, 5 April 1942.

struggle. Hindus, vowed the resolution, will “defy and defeat any attempt on the part of Moslems to carve out” Pakistan and will “resist” the British government “in [the] case it sides with the Moslems in pursuance of an anti-Hindu policy.”¹⁶

The crisis in the Hindu Mahasabha in the summer of 1942

The Empire’s initial balance sheet of the Cripps’ Mission was very positive. Not only had the Americans been silenced, but the Congress appeared to be fracturing. Against Gandhi’s wishes, Azad and Nehru had persisted in the search for a formula that would enable the Congress to enter the British Indian government and lend support to the Allied cause. No sooner had Cripps departed, than C.R. Rajagopalachari, the South Indian Congressman who had often been touted as Gandhi’s successor, secured the Madras Congress legislative party’s support for resolutions urging Congress to re-establish its provincial ministries and cede the Muslim League’s Pakistan demand in exchange for a joint push for an “emergency national government.” Boasted the Viceroy, “[W]e have reduced them to pulp and destroyed the national spirit.”¹⁷

Believing the Congress defanged, Linlithgow proposed that more non-officials be brought onto his Council. Rewarding prominent Indians who had supported the Allied war effort with Council seats would mollify “moderate” nationalist opinion after its “disappointment” over the Cripps’ Offer.

However, in the time it took Linlithgow to win London’s approval for his plan, the political situation shifted radically. Fearing that India would be transformed into a Second World War battlefield, Gandhi abruptly ended his “retirement” from political life and began laying the groundwork for a new campaign against British rule. It was the

¹⁶ *Mahratta*, 1 May 1942.

¹⁷ Linlithgow to Amery, 25 May 1942, *TOP*, 2: 123.

British presence, argued Gandhi, that made India a potential military target of the Japanese. To the shock and horror of the *Raj*, the INC's more militant stance struck a chord among an Indian populace angered by price rises, shortages of essential commodities, and the imperial authorities' callous abandonment of expatriate Indians to the Japanese advance across south-east Asia. The military's "denial policy" stirred great resentment among the fishermen of coastal Bengal and Assam whose boats were seized so as to prevent their falling into enemy hands if the Japanese invaded. India's industrialists and financiers were also anxious and opposed: "Would not 'scorched earth' ruin their factories?"¹⁸

The threat of a Congress civil disobedience movement and one, moreover, that could coincide with a Japanese attack on India's eastern border gave the planned expansion of the Viceroy's Council new meaning and urgency. In early July, less than two weeks before the Congress Working Committee adopted a resolution threatening to launch mass civil disobedience if the British didn't "Quit India," the Viceroy announced a second expansion of his Council.¹⁹

Among the five new Indian councillors was Sir J.P. Srivastava, a member of the National Defence Council and the dominant figure in the UP Provincial Hindu Sabha. In

¹⁸ From the journalist Edgar Snow's account of Indian views prior to the outbreak of the Quit India uprising. Cited in Suniti Kumar Ghosh, *India and the Raj*, Vol. 2, 217.

Indians had good reason to fear that in defending India from the Japanese the British would put their global interests first. After all, one of the chief reasons India was so vulnerable to attack was that much of the British Indian army was fighting elsewhere. Voigt notes that over British objections the Australian government withdrew its troops assigned for service in Burma and Ceylon, when it feared Japanese attack. India, by contrast, had no control over the deployment of Indian troops and none were withdrawn from either north Africa or south-west Asia. "India provided the only large reservoir of troops of the Empire which Britain had at its disposal without any restriction." See Voigt, 140-41.

¹⁹ Three new Council portfolios were created. But because of two deaths and Sir Andrew Clow's assumption of the governorship of Assam a total of six persons, five Indians and one "European", were named to the Council, raising the total Indian representation to eleven on a council of fifteen. *Indian Information*, 15 July 1942, 52

keeping with the Mahasabha's emphasis on militarization, Srivastava was named head of the Civil Defence Department.

Publicly the expansion was justified by the increasing administrative demands arising from the war.²⁰ But it was patently part of the colonial state's preparations for a clash with the Congress. The colonial authorities wanted both to bind the INC's political opponents more closely to the government and to better position themselves to argue before world, and in particular American, public opinion that the Congress spoke for only a minority of Indians.

Employing traditional British aristocratic understatement, Linlithgow observed, "there may well be some little value in the fact that the important discussions that are now going on about policy towards Congress and possibly the decision to arrest Gandhi ..." will be conducted by a Council with substantial non-official and Indian majorities.²¹ How little? On August 12, Churchill telegraphed Roosevelt: "Decision to intern Gandhi was taken by Executive of twelve, at which only one European was present. These Indians are as good Indian patriots and as able men as any of the Congress leaders. ... [I]t is essential not to weaken their authority ..."22

As compared with those elevated to his Council the year before, Linlithgow's July 1942 appointees had much stronger anti-Congress credentials.²³ B.R. Ambedkar, the new Labour Member, had come to national attention by challenging Gandhi's claim to speak for India's Untouchables. He remained one of the INC's most strident and effective

²⁰ V. P. Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, 142-43.

²¹ Linlithgow to Amery, 28 July 1942 *TOP*, 2: 485.

²² *TOP*, 2: 687.

²³ In December 1940, G.D. Birla had won Gandhi's approval for a list of eight "really good men" whom he could recommend be brought onto the Viceroy's Council to give it a more "representative" character. Birla promptly forwarded the list to Linlithgow. Three of the eight—Nalini Sarkar, Sir Sultan Ahmed and M.S. Aney—were among the those appointed Councillors in July 1941. See Suniti Kumar Ghosh, *India and the Raj*, Vol. 2, 200.

critics. Secretary of State Amery had championed Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar, the then *Dewan* of Travancore, for the Information Ministry, because of Aiyar's "ability and spirited resistance to Gandhi's encouragement of Travancore seditionists."²⁴ Sir Jogendra Singh was an Oudh *taluqdar* who for many year's had been the most prominent Sikh in Punjab's pro-British Unionist Ministry.

Srivastava certainly fitted this mould. For fifteen years, dating back to his chairmanship of the UP legislative committee that liaised with the Simon Commission, Srivastava had been a leader of the conservative opposition to the Congress in the United Provinces. From 1931 to 1937, he had served as a Minister in the province's pro-landlord government. He had been a key mover in the National Agriculturist Party and following the NAP's failure at the polls had sought to revitalize the Mahasabha so as to make it a vehicle for fighting the Congress. Of his Food Minister Srivastava, Linlithgow's successor Viceroy Wavell would write: "He dislikes democracy and Congress, and adjured me to get rid of this headcounting business as quite unsuitable for India."²⁵

Officially, Srivastava did not sit on the Council as a Mahasabha representative. Whereas the Cripps Offer had been "specifically contingent upon Parties as such being represented in the Government," the colonial authorities maintained, as they did at the time of the first expansion, that the Councillors named in July 1942 were chosen on "the basis of individual merit."²⁶ This was a ruse. Srivastava was the Mahasabha's foremost leader in the UP and his name had been on the lists of Council nominees previously submitted by the Mahasabha to the Viceroy. In private Linlithgow acknowledged that the Mahasabha was represented on his Council. My Executive, the Viceroy, told Viscount

²⁴ Amery to Linlithgow, 30 May 1942, *TOP*, 2: 151.

²⁵ Wavell, *The Viceroy's Journal*: 68.

²⁶ *TOP*, 2: 862.

Halifax, "represents Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Depressed Classes, Parsis, the Hindu Mahasabha, and non-official Europeans."²⁷ That the Hindu Mahasabha was allied with the British in a coalition in all but name was underlined by the appointment of another prominent UP Mahasabhite, Pandit Rajnath Kunzru, to the vacancy on the National Defence Council created when Srivastava was elevated to the Viceroy's Council.

British expectations that Srivastava would provide grist for the anti-Congress mill were soon rewarded. No sooner had he taken his Council seat than Srivastava was making what the Viceroy termed "useful contributions" on how the Congress could be suppressed.²⁸

If there was any doubt as to the Mahasabha supporting Srivastava's appointment, it was almost immediately dispelled by Savarkar. He congratulated the UP Mahasabhite on his appointment and welcomed the expansion as a whole.²⁹ Thus the Mahasabha strengthened its ties to the government at the very point when the colonial regime was preparing to do battle with the Indian Nation Congress.

In endorsing the July 1942 Council expansion, the erstwhile nationalist-terrorist Savarkar took a more "moderate" nationalist stance than T.B. Saprú and other self-professed moderates. Voices more critical of the Council makeover were also heard in the Hindu Mahasabha. Bengal Hindu Sabha Working President N.C. Chatterjee dismissed the expansion as a "damp squib" and joined Moonje in condemning the naming of a Muslim to the new Defence portfolio. (Commander-in-Chief Wavell retained the real levers of power as head of the War Department.) According to Moonje and

²⁷ Linlithgow to Lord Halifax, 22 August 1942, *TOP*, 3: 17.

²⁸ Linlithgow to Amery, 29 July 1942, *TOP*, 2, 489: "We had a good discussion in Council this morning on action against the Congress ... Ambedkar, Usman and Srivastava appeared for the first time and made quite useful contributions."

²⁹ *Mahratta*, 10 July 1942.

Chatterjee, Sir Firoz Khan Noon's appointment proved there was "an Anglo-Muslim conspiracy to throw the Hindus overboard."³⁰

Savarkar's response to such implicit criticism was to pout. As Keer concedes in his otherwise laudatory biography, Savarkar had a prickly personality and little tolerance for dissent. Not even the Congress Working Committee's adoption of its Quit India resolution bestirred him. Fearing their party risked being marginalized if not discredited should the Congress and *Raj* collide, many Mahasabhites pressed for a leadership meeting to develop a common and distinctive course of action. Savarkar was deaf to these concerns. Exclaimed an exasperated Maheshwar Dayal, the Raja of Kotra and the Mahasabha's General Secretary, "I do not know why he is so much against the convening of the meeting."³¹

What makes Savarkar's position all the more startling is that most of those pressing for a leadership meeting shared his opposition to the threatened Congress movement. A requisition for an emergency meeting of the Mahasabha's All-India Committee, initiated by leaders of the Bengal Hindu Sabha warned, "any precipitate mass movement at this stage cannot be conducive to national interests and is likely to be exploited to create further cleavage between the communities and the classes and will lead to consolidation of forces inimical to the interests of Hindus."³² Maheshwar Dayal, who helped circulate the requisition, deplored the threatened Congress agitation. On July 30 he told the press, "such a movement will hurl the country into chaos and confusion and make it an easy prey to our enemy. It is bound to create an atmosphere in which lawlessness and class conflict will thrive. It would lead to a breakdown of all ordered life

³⁰ *Leader*, 10 July 1942.

³¹ Dayal Maheshwar Seth to Chandra Gupta Vedalkar, 30 July 1942, HMS C-40.

³² *Leader*, 30 July 1942.

...³³ In calling for a meeting of the Hindu Mahasabha's all-India Working Committee, the Punjab Hindu Sabha's Executive Committee reiterated that the Mahasabha "has never ... and does not even now support the policy and programme of the Congress ..."³⁴

On July 31, one week before the All-India Congress Committee was to meet to decide whether to authorize the launching of a Quit India campaign, Savarkar dropped a bombshell. He announced he was stepping down as Mahasabha President, because of ill health. Savarkar's resignation caught the Mahasabha leadership, to say nothing of the rank and file, by surprise. Mahasabha General-Secretary Maheshwar Dayal complained that he learned of it from the radio.³⁵ "We were simply taken aback, when the news of your resignation ... was communicated to us by the Associated Press," wrote the leadership of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Sabha in an appeal for Savarkar to reconsider.

Amidst the universal confusion and chaos, you have been the one beckon-light in Hindudom ... Particularly in view of Mahatmaji's threatened movement, the Hindu Sabhais [sic] in this province and the neighbouring provinces are deeply perturbed and they want a bold and determined lead. We wish you would continue as the President.³⁶

Savarkar, as we shall see, clung to the post of All-India Hindu Mahasabha President till December 1944, i.e. for almost two-and-a-half more years. He did suffer from poor health, at least in part as a consequence of his long imprisonment at Andaman. The explanation of his 31 July 1942 resignation requires, however, a political, not a medical, diagnosis. Recognizing that he could not forever put off the convening of a Working Committee meeting, Savarkar decided to disarm his critics and precipitate an outpouring of support for his leadership. The ploy worked. By the time the Mahasabha

³³ *Leader*, 2 August 1942.

³⁴ *Leader*, 31 July 1942.

³⁵ HMS, File C-40,

³⁶ *Mahratta*, 7 August 1942.

Working Committee convened at the end of August virtually every provincial, district and princely state Hindu Sabha had urged Savarkar to rescind his resignation.³⁷ But Savarkar's triumph came at the cost of destabilizing the Mahasabha. It had neither a president nor an articulated and approved policy, when the Quit India rebellion erupted.

Savarkar did not exit the political stage, even temporarily, after announcing his resignation. At a mass rally in Poona on August 2 he outlined the Mahasabha's terms for supporting the Congress in challenging British rule. Savarkar's conditions were outlandish. That they were framed with the purpose of mobilizing the Mahasabha against—not behind—the Congress was underscored by Savarkar's assertion that if his terms were rejected, "this Congress movement ... would prove more detrimental to the Hindus than the 1919-1922 *Khilafat-Swaraj* movement had been." To invoke the *Khilafat* movement in a Mahasabha meeting was akin to waving the proverbial red flag before a bull, for Gandhi's linking of the Congress to the *Khilafat* agitation was, in Hindu nationalist lore, arguably his greatest crime. In return for Mahasabhite support, Savarkar demanded that the Congress fight Pakistan, rip up the Communal Award, end all reservations in public sector employment, insist all residuary constitutional powers be lodged in the central government, and, most importantly, recognize "the Hindu Mahasabha as the representative Hindu Body" and "take no steps regarding special Hindu rights without its sanction."³⁸

True to his word, the day after India erupted in protest against the *Raj*'s pre-emptive strike on the Congress, Savarkar issued a statement urging Hindu Mahasabhites and "Hindus in general" "not to extend any active support." Citing the INC's failure "to

³⁷ *Leader*, 18 August 1942.

³⁸ As cited in, *Mahasabha Parliamentary Board. Bulletin No. 1 The Coming Elections: Congress vs. Mahasava. Questions and Answers.*

remove the serious imperfections” in its Quit India resolution, the Mahasabha President said any movement it inspired would “prove most detrimental” to Hindu interests and “the integrity and strength of India as a nation and a state.”³⁹

Other Mahasabha leaders were no less forthright in their opposition to the Quit India agitation. Indeed, so great was Parmanand’s hostility to the Congress, he objected even to Savarkar’s bogus offer of conditional support.⁴⁰ In his August 14 “Appeal to the People,” Moonje condemned the Congress inspired popular movement as “anti-democratic” and claimed that it was jeopardizing the emergence of “an agreed constitutional system” under the *Raj*’s tutelage.⁴¹ As a member of the Viceroy’s Council, Srivastava had been a party to the decision to arrest the Congress leadership immediately after its All-India Congress Committee endorsed the Quit India resolution. The wave of repression was very much a pre-emptive strike: the colonial authorities had deemed that Congress was organizationally incapable of mounting a civil disobedience campaign for another month and believed Gandhi’s threats might well be an elaborate bluff. With Gandhi under detention, the *Raj* had to consider its attitude should he undertake a fast. “I have confidentially consulted [Councillor A.R.] Mudaliar and Srivastava,” the Viceroy informed the Secretary of State August 12. “Both are most firmly opposed to any compromise with Gandhi, which, as Mudaliar remarked, would represent an abdication. Srivastava would let him fast to death.”⁴²

The Mahasabha’s attitude toward the Congress-threatened agitation and to the mass rising precipitated by the arrest of the INC leaders mirrored that of the Muslim

³⁹ *Leader*, 12 August 1942.

⁴⁰ D.A. Brayden, Central Intelligence Officer, Calcutta, “Hindu Mahasabha and Congress Movement,” Report of 5 August 1942: IOR, R/3/2/33.

⁴¹ As cited in Bidyut Chakrabarty, 25.

⁴² *TOP*, 2: 668.

League. Only the community whose interests were allegedly in peril was inversed. In the weeks preceding the August 1942 Bombay All-India Congress Committee meeting, Jinnah accused Gandhi and the Congress of being bent on “blackmailing” and “coercing” the British into conceding “Hindu *Raj*.”⁴³ The League’s opposition was enshrined and amplified in its August 20th Working Committee resolution: “[T]he present Congress movement is not directed for securing the independence of all the constituent elements in the life of the country, but for the establishment of a Hindu *Raj* and to deal a death blow to the Muslim goal of Pakistan.” The resolution was mum on the wave of repression that the colonial regime had unleashed against the Congress, but indicted the *Raj* for making “appeasement” of the Congress “the central pivot” of its policy and thus inviting “open defiance of law and order.”⁴⁴ So blatant was the parallel between the Mahasabha’s and League’s opposition to the Quit India movement that even the Bengal Hindu Mahasabha’s Working President remarked on it derisively:

It is rather amusing to find that Mr. Jinnah wants the Mussalmans not to join the Congress movement and Mr. Savarkar wants the Hindus not to join the same. Even then, the Congress movement has made a great stir ...⁴⁵

S.P. Mookerjee, the Bengal Hindu Sabha and the Quit India movement

The Bengal Mahasabhites’ attitude toward the Quit India movement merits special attention since serious tensions between the Maharashtran and Bengali Mahasabhites Savarkar and Mookerjee and between the can be dated from August 1942. The pressures bearing down on the Bengal Mahasabha are indicated in a claim made by its Working President, N.C. Chatterjee, shortly after the eruption of the Quit India rebellion: “[T]he entire Hindu population is in sympathy with Gandhiji and his

⁴³ Menon, *Transfer of Power*, 141.

⁴⁴ *TOP*, 2: 771.

⁴⁵ Intercepted letter N.C. Chatterjee to B.S. Moonje, 14 August 1942: IOR, R/3/2/33.

movement” and “if anybody wants to oppose it, he will be absolutely finished and hounded out of public life.”⁴⁶ As a proponent of Mahasabha participation in the agitation, Chatterjee had reason to exaggerate its support. The Governor of Bengal had no such need. Yet in a letter written somewhat later, after the *Raj* had taken the measure of the uprising and gone a long way to restabilizing its rule, John Herbert conceded that “among the Hindu community ... there is widespread sympathy for the ‘freedom’ section of the Congress resolution, and a general desire to see some form of ‘National’ Government set up.”⁴⁷

The extent of the Bengal Mahasabha’s popular support—even if it was largely confined to the *bhadralok*—made it more vulnerable than other provincial Hindu Sabhas to the pro-Congress popular current. So too did the political space that the Bengal Mahasabha was trying to occupy. Everywhere the Mahasabha championed “Hindu unity” and “Hindu interests,” but the pursuit of these goals necessarily had a different urgency and import in Bengal, where the *Raj*’s communal political categories and the elite’s communal political appeals had defined it a “Muslim-majority province.”

The range of tendencies in the Bengal Hindu Sabha is suggested by a brief look at the persons who held its principal offices and their respective attitudes toward the Quit India movement. A prominent Calcutta lawyer, the aforementioned Chatterjee had become active in the Mahasabha in the late 1930s and had help draw Mookerjee into its leadership. Chatterjee was possibly alone among its nationally-known leaders in militating in August 1942 for the Mahasabha to join the Congress-initiated opposition movement. He seized on Savarkar’s offer of “conditional” support to the Congress to

⁴⁶ Intercepted letter N.C. Chatterjee to B.S. Moonje, 14 August 1942: IOR, R/3/2/33.

⁴⁷ Herbert to Linlithgow, 25 August 1942, *Bengal Documents, II*, 179-80.

convene a secret meeting on August 4 with the aim of laying the groundwork for Mahasabha participation in the proposed anti-*Raj* agitation. Attended by selected leaders of the Bengal Hindu Sabha, its affiliates, and “various physical culture clubs of Bengal,” the meeting decided to mobilize “all Hindu volunteer” groups behind a joint Congress-Mahasabha challenge to British rule.⁴⁸ Ashutosh Lahiry, the Bengal Mahasabha’s General Secretary, was a former Andaman detainee. A staunch Hindu nationalist and political disciple of Savarkar, Lahiry had been active in the Bengal Hindu Sabha since the mid-1920s. Lahiry would lend support to the Quit India movement only if the Congress leadership agreed to all of Savarkar’s conditions. The Bengal Hindu Sabha’s President was an ailing, 67-year-old Sir Manmathanath Mukherji. A retired Calcutta High Court Judge, he had been associated with the *Raj* and its institutions for decades.⁴⁹

The Bengal Hindu Sabha’s foremost leader was Shyma Prasad Mookerjee. The son of the renowned Bengali educationalist Ashutosh Mookerjee, S.P. Mookerjee had severed his ties to the Congress at the beginning of its 1930-34 mass civil disobedience campaign. Mookerjee’s claim to represent the *bhadralok*, whose self-identity and privileged social position were increasingly bound up with educational success, was reinforced by his own academic reputation. A lawyer by training, Mookerjee was named vice-chancellor of Calcutta University at the age of just 33. In 1943 he would become the first Indian ever elected president of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ D.A. Brayden, Central Intelligence Officer, Calcutta, “Hindu Mahasabha and Congress Movement,” Report of 5 August 1942; “Daily Report on the Situation in Calcutta dated the 11 August, 1942 (No. 98); Intercepted letter N.C. Chatterjee to B.S. Moonje, 14 August 1942. All in IOR, R/3/2/33.

⁴⁹ D.A. Brayden, Central Intelligence Officer, Calcutta, “Hindu Mahasabha” a report on the meeting drafted 11 August 1942: IOR, R/3/2/33.

⁵⁰ Balraj Madhok, *Portrait of a martyr*, 16 and 21.

Unlike Savarkar, Mookerjee would concede that a class dynamic—not just “Muslim fanaticism”—underlay much of Bengal’s communal strife. But this only made his linking of communal and class appeals more explicit. He upheld the privileges of the *bhadralok* on the grounds that it constituted the flower of “new Bengal.” For Mookerjee, the contrast between the Hindu elite’s wealth and intellectual achievement and the poverty and backwardness of Bengal’s Muslim-majority laboring classes attested not to a dysfunction in Bengali society, but rather to the injustice of the communal partition of power in the province’s legislature. To his thinking, an Anglo-Muslim combine had placed Bengal’s betters at the mercy of the unwashed and the uneducated.

As the self-professed communal political spokesman for Bengal’s Hindu minority, Mookerjee both wanted to forge “Hindu political unity”—that is, an alliance between the Mahasabha and the overwhelmingly upper caste Hindu Bengal Congress—and to use the All-India Mahasabha to compel the Congress to more vigorously defend the class and communal interests of the *bhadralok*. In a summary of the Mahasabha’s recent history that he wrote in 1945-46, Mookerjee stressed that he had always sought to prevent a clash between the Mahasabha and the Congress, at least in Bengal.

irrespective of what happened in other parts of India ... I never wanted the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha to be at loggerheads with each other in Bengal. ... I discussed this point with [(Official) Bengal Congress leaders] Kiron Sankar Roy and [Dr.] Bidhan [Chandra] Roy. During the last six years, it had been my endeavour that our parties should work together despite our differences. ... I believed that both the parties were needed equally in Bengal. There was absolute necessity for the existence of a political party, exclusively for the Hindus, to counter the British and Muslim League conspiracy against the Hindus. This party would not hinder India’s struggle for freedom, but it would support it, and at the same time it would try its utmost to give protection to the Hindus.⁵¹

⁵¹ S.P. Mookerjee, *Diary*: 108, and 110-111.

Mookerjee's attempt to forge a united, Hindu communal political bloc under the leadership of the *bhadralok* was fraught with difficulties. The *bhadralok*'s privileges were threatened not only by their Muslim communal political adversaries, but also by the politicization of the Namasudra and other lower caste groups and by the growth of leftist, worker, and *kisan sabha* agitation. The Bengali Congress was itself riven with division. And, as we have seen and shall further substantiate during the remainder of this dissertation, Savarkar and the majority of the Hindu Mahasabha leadership and cadre were militantly anti-Congress.

In August 1942 Mookerjee had to contend with multiple pressures, including the fact that he was the second most important minister in a shaky coalition ministry whose *raison d'être* was to deny the Muslim League a share of power. (With the tacit support of the Congress, Mookerjee and Sarat Chandra Bose had taken advantage of a power struggle between Fazul Huq and the Muslim League the previous December to form a new coalition ministry based on their followers and Huq's. Subsequently, Mookerjee had prevailed upon Huq to dropped the legislative initiatives that most troubled the *bhadralok*: the proposed Secondary Education Bill and a plan to abolish Bengal's *zamindari* system of land tenure.)⁵²

Like the vast majority of Mahasabha leaders, Mookerjee feared the socially incendiary impact of a mass challenge to British rule. A "mass movement" would, as the

⁵² Mookerjee owed his prominence in what the Muslim League derisively termed the Huq-Mookerjee ministry only because Sarat Chandra Bose had been arrested on the eve of the ministry's planned investiture. The brother of Subhas Chandra Bose and co-leader of the Forward Bloc, Sarat Chandra Bose had been slated for the Finance post and would have assumed the mantle of de facto Hindu deputy premier had the British not interned him on suspicion of pro-Japanese activity. See Mookerjee, *Diary*, 47-49; Leonard Gordon, *Brothers Against the Raj: A Biography of Indian Nationalists Sarat & Subhas Chandra Bose*, (New York, Columbia University, 1990) 439.

Bengali Mahasbhites had warned in their requisition for an emergency meeting of the All-India Mahasabha leadership, result in “further cleavage” “between the classes.” At the same time, Mookerjee could ill afford to ignore the profound anti-*Raj* sentiment in Bengal, a sentiment that the military’s arbitrary and economically destabilizing “denial policy” was further stoking. Compounding matters, as a provincial minister he would perforce be implicated in the *Raj*’s campaign of repression in the event of a showdown between the *Raj* and the Congress.

On July 26, Mookerjee addressed a long letter to Bengal Governor Herbert decrying bureaucratic oversight of his ministry and elaborating an alternative government policy aimed at ensuring “that in spite of the best efforts of the Congress, [the Quit India] movement will fail to take root in the province.” Given that Mookerjee made demands—including unfettered ministerial control over provincial administration—he knew Herbert would and could not accept, it is evident he wrote this letter with the intention of justifying before the public his current presence in government and a possible future resignation. Certainly, that was Herbert’s impression. But in the end Mookerjee did not seize on the *Raj*’s pre-emptive strike against the Congress to quit the Ministry and snatch himself some nationalist glory. His overriding concern was keeping the Muslim League from power, and he feared that Herbert would exploit a ministerial crisis to replace Huq’s National Progressive coalition with a League government. A second consideration may well have been concern that his resignation could redound against him by spurring on those in the Mahasabha who were eager to join the anti-*Raj* movement. Given the temper of the times, Mookerjee had to fear that a gesture intended to preserve his and the Mahasabha’s nationalist credentials, while keeping it apart from the Congress-*Raj*

confrontation, could in fact spur on those in the Mahasabha who were eager to join the anti-*Raj* movement.

* * *

Balraj Madhok, the one-time Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Jana Sangh leader and Mookerjee's biographer, claims that the Bengali Mahasabha leader met Gandhi at Allahabad Railway station just prior to the All-India Congress Committee meeting in Bombay that adopted the Quit India resolution:

The Working Committee of the Hindu Mahasabha met at Lucknow on the 7th of August. Dr. Mookerji wanted the Mahasabha to plunge in any movement that might be launched by the Congress for wresting freedom ... But Veer Savarkar and other leaders of [the] Mahasabha were opposed to this policy.

...

Before returning to Calcutta, Dr. Mookerji met Mahatma Gandhi, who was proceeding to Bombay, at Allahabad station. Mahatma Gandhi advised Dr. Mookerji not to join the movement that he was then planning on the plea that somebody must remain behind to lead the country when the Congress leaders would be in jail.⁵³

This account is frequently repeated in pro-RSS publications and even some scholars have accepted Madhok's claim of a Mookerjee-Gandhi meeting in August 1942.⁵⁴ They should not have. Firstly, the Mahasabha Working Committee did not meet in Lucknow on August 7. As we have seen, the convening of a Working Committee meeting was the subject of much controversy in the Mahasabha. Because of Savarkar's objections, the Mahasabha leadership did not meet till August 31. Secondly, Gandhi did not travel through Lucknow on August 7 or, for that matter, any other day in the weeks immediately preceding or following August 7. Throughout July, Gandhi was at his *ashram* near Wardha or in Wardha itself. From there, he travelled on August 3 to Bombay, where he remained till his arrest by *Raj*

⁵³ Mahdok, *Portrait of a martyr*, 39-40.

⁵⁴ Gondhalekar and Bhattacharya, "The All-India Hindu Mahasabha and the End of British Rule in India, 1939-1947": 58.

security forces early on the morning of August 9.⁵⁵ Thirdly, Mookerjee makes no mention of a meeting with Gandhi in the retrospective account that he provides in his diary of his political activity in 1942. He does, however, refer to his having interrupted a New Delhi-to-Calcutta train journey in Allahabad in late July 1942, to confer with Jawaharlal Nehru. Mookerjee says he gave Nehru “copies of my letters to the Governor which indicated how I was struggling against heavy odds while carrying on my duties as minister.” But he makes no mention of Nehru imploring him to remain aloof from the impending Congress agitation, let alone doing so for India’s greater good!⁵⁶

* * *

On August 9, Mookerjee and the other members of the Bengal cabinet met to hear a report from Governor Herbert on the steps the *Raj* had taken to snuff the planned Congress agitation in its bud. Mookerjee claims—and his account is substantiated by Herbert’s—that he protested against the central government’s failure to apprise its Bengal ministers in advance of the measures to be taken against the Congress.⁵⁷ In forcing a confrontation with Congress, the *Raj* had placed Mookerjee and the two Forward Block Ministers in an exceedingly difficult position and Herbert and his minions were well aware of it. Reported Herbert to Linlithgow, the caste Hindu ministers “find themselves in a quandary knowing that if they resign there is a likelihood that a Muslim League

⁵⁵ C.B. Dalal, *Gandhi: 1915-1948—A Detailed Chronology* (New Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation, 1971) 139.

⁵⁶ Mookerjee, *Diary*: 70-71.

The claim that Gandhi urged Mookerjee to stand aloof from the Quit India movement packs a powerful political punch. It also has a much greater air of plausibility, than would a claim Nehru had so counselled Bengal’s leading Hindu Mahasabhaite. Gandhi was reputedly on friendly terms with Mookerjee and frequently gave “missions” to persons outside Congress. Of all the members of the Congress High Command, Nehru was the most scathing in his estimation of the Hindu Mahasabha, dismissing it as a fount of communal bigotry and bulwark of feudal reaction. Admittedly, Mookerjee and Nehru later served together in India’s first post-independence cabinet, but relations between them were strained. Vallabhbhai Patel, the Home Minister and de facto leader of the Congress right, frequently had to act as their mediator and/or go-between.

⁵⁷ Mookerjee, *Diary*: 71; Herbert to Linlithgow, 10 August 1942, *Bengal Documents*, 2: 177-178.

majority will come in and forever jeopardise Hindu interests in Bengal.”⁵⁸ In the days and weeks to come, Mookerjee would maintain a stance of studied ambiguity with respect to his future as Bengal’s Finance Minister. However, on August 9 he did assure the Governor that the Mahasabha would not join any anti-*Raj* agitation.⁵⁹ And when the cabinet discussed the list of Bengali Congress leaders targeted for arrest, Mookerjee, Huq and their colleagues questioned the inclusion of just one name.⁶⁰

This is in keeping with the stand Mookerjee took the following day at a meeting of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Sabha Working Committee. When the meeting voted on the actions taken by the *Raj* to suppress the Congress, including the shooting of anti-government demonstrators, twenty voted to oppose them, three abstained and Mookerjee and two others voted in favor. N.C. Chatterjee then challenged Mookerjee to explain how he could reconcile his vote with his claim to be demanding that responsibility for pacifying Bengal be the provincial ministry’s and the ministry’s alone. In reply Mookerjee defended the action taken by the *Raj*’s security forces in Bombay as it was the “hot-bed of the movement.” Bengal’s position, he argued “was altogether different.”⁶¹

Only after this vote had revealed Mookerjee to be virtually alone in defending the suppression of the Congress did he begin brandishing his threat to quit the Bengal Ministry. Clearly Mookerjee was trying to ease anxieties about the warmth of his embrace of the *Raj*; he likely was also trying to focus the Committee’s attention on the impact that the Congress-*Raj* clash could have on the communal power struggle in Bengal legislative politics. In this light, Mookerjee’s threat was directed at least as much

⁵⁸ Herbert to Linlithgow, 10 August 1942: *Bengal Documents*, II, 176.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*: 178.

⁶⁰ “Daily Report on the Situation in Calcutta dated the 11 August, 1942 (No. 98)”: IOR, R/3/2/33.

⁶¹ D.A. Brayden, Central Intelligence Officer, Calcutta, “Hindu Mahasabha,” a report on the meeting drafted 11 August 1942: IOR, R/3/2/33.

at his fellow MahasabHITE leaders, who shared his apprehensions about a League ministry, as at the British.⁶²

When the Working Committee resumed its deliberations on August 11, the members, N.C. Chatterjee excepted, "were more cautious." Ultimately, the meeting issued a resolution that protested "the policy of repression which has been launched by the Government of India" and demanded the "transfer of real political power" to a National Government. The decision whether the Bengal Mahasabha should associate itself with the anti-*Raj* movement then sweeping India was deferred to the All-India Mahasabha Working Committee meeting that was to be held in three weeks. In accordance with this policy Manoranjan Chowdhury and other Bengal Hindu Sabha leaders met with MahsabHITE activists in outlying districts to order them to stay aloof from the anti-*Raj* movement. Moreover, the Mahasabha leadership in Bengal remained united in imploring Savarkar, his deep-rooted hostility to the Congress notwithstanding, to resume his functions as Mahasabha President.⁶³

As for Mookerjee, on August 12 he sent a letter to the Viceroy that demanded Britain immediately declare India "free" and warned that should the *Raj* "allow the present impasse to continue" he would be obliged to resign from the Bengal ministry.⁶⁴ This proved to be a lie. Through mid-November, long after Linlithgow had sent the inevitable negative reply, Mookerjee clung to his post. And all the while, he made statements upholding the right, nay duty, of the government to suppress any threat to the established order. He did so, although he held that the first major disturbance in Calcutta

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Mahratta*, 12 August 1942; D.A. Brayden, Central Intelligence Officer, Calcutta, "Hindu Mahasabha," (Report of 14 August 1942) and "Daily Report on the Situation in Calcutta dated the 11 August, 1942 (No. 98)": both IOR, R/3/2/33.

⁶⁴ Mookerjee, *Diary*: 197.

had been provoked by *Raj* security forces and considered that the police, army and bureaucracy were blithely ignoring his and his fellow ministers' pleas for restraint. "[I]nnocent lives were [being] taken" and "we," says Mookerjee, referring to the Bengal ministry, "were entirely helpless in the matter."⁶⁵

A Hindu Mahasabha government?: The scope and intensity of the Quit India uprising rattled the colonial regime. For several weeks, the *Raj* lost effective control of north-central Bihar and eastern UP. Fifty-seven army battalions were deployed in counter-insurgency operations during August and September 1942. Three weeks after the colonial state had launched its pre-emptive strike and arrested the Congress leadership, Linlithgow told Churchill, "I am engaged here in meeting by far the most serious rebellion since that of 1857, the gravity and extent of which we have so far concealed from the world for reasons of military security."⁶⁶

Seeking some means of giving the colonial government greater legitimacy, Linlithgow yet again considered the feasibility of reconstituting his Council "to include representatives of parties apart from Congress." As on previous occasions the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha were to play "the principal part" in this scheme. With the League maintaining its demand for a majority of Council seats, Linlithgow even raised the possibility of making the Hindu Mahasabha the pivot of a "popular" Indian government. In his "Sketch Notes—Opening of Discussion on Constitutional Matters in Council," the Viceroy asked "[C]an we conceive a Government, in which the Mahasabha, a frankly

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*: 74-75

⁶⁶ Linlithgow to Churchill, 31 August 1942, *TOP*, 2: 853. For more on the Quit India rebellion, see Gyanendra Pandey, ed., *The Indian Nation in 1942*, (Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi, 1988).

communal body would play the leading part”⁶⁷ Meeting with his Councillors on August 15, Linlithgow raised the possibility of a Mahasabha-led government, then dismissed it as unworkable: “[T]he Mahasabha by itself could hardly claim to represent the country.”⁶⁸ Most of the Council concurred with Linlithgow in opposing any Council reorganization, but “Srivastava [was] strongly in favour of building on the Mahasabha if the other parties would not come in ...”⁶⁹ Subsequently, Linlithgow expanded on his thinking. “[F]ailing agreement between as a minimum the Mahasabha and the Muslim League there is no nucleus for a Government likely to command greater support than my present Executive. ... [T]o form a Government on the basis either of the Muslim League alone or of the Mahasabha alone” would result in “country-wide communal collisions.” “The alternative of a coalition between the two, unrealisable as it is at the moment, would be shaky enough,”⁷⁰

That Linlithgow could entertain, even if only fleetingly and at a point of extreme crisis, the notion of building an interim regime around the Mahasabha is significant for several reasons: First, it shows the extent to which the British had come to view the Mahasabha as a dependable ally. Secondly, it exemplifies the colonial authorities’ extreme political isolation in August 1942. Last but not least, it affords a marked contrast with the position the British took less than three years later when convening the post-war Simla conference. Then the colonial authorities deemed the Mahasabha to be of so little significance that it did not merit even a single conference delegate.

⁶⁷ *TOP*, 2: 706. The document is undated, but the *TOP* editors conclude that it was probably drafted by Linlithgow in preparing for a meeting of his Council on 15 August 1942.

⁶⁸ Linlithgow to Amery, 17 August 1942, *TOP*, 2: 744.

⁶⁹ *TOP*, 2: 871.

⁷⁰ Linlithgow to Viscount Halifax, 22 August 1942, *TOP*, 3: 17.

Chapter 5: Whither the Hindu Mahasabha? The trials and tribulations of India's "Third Force" in Quit India's aftermath

According to a contemporary observer, "When the Congress went into the wilderness ... the Hindu Mahasabha came into the limelight as it was the only organization to which the Hindu could look ... both for urging the Hindu cause as against the militant communalism of the Muslim League and generally to propagate nationalism ..."¹ As a reference to what was happening on the streets of India, this citation is worth little. What is true is that in the weeks and months following the eruption of the Quit India movement, elite circles accorded the Hindu Mahasabha unprecedented attention. A Hindu Mahasabha-initiated campaign for a "national government" secured broad, intercommunal support, including from the dissident Congressmen C.R. Rajagopalachari and K.M. Munshi. In rapid succession, the Viceroy and the Muslim League President granted the Mahasabha's acting Working President, S.P. Mookerjee, an audience. Never had the Mahasabha appeared closer to realizing its goal of becoming the third force in Indian politics.

But the Mahasabha's new prominence aggravated its internal divisions and brought it under increased pressure from without. Having made claim to be the voice of the nation, the Mahasabha found itself rent by differences over its attitude toward the Quit India movement, the colonial regime and the Muslim League. Mookerjee and other leaders of the Mahasabha's "National Demand" campaign were accused of betraying the Mahasabha's commitment to *Akhand Hindusthan* and bargaining with Jinnah over Pakistan. Although Savarkar refrained from making this charge in public, he and the

¹ *Indian Year Book* (1943-44): 831.

Mahratta did publicly imply that Mookerjee and other “National Demand” enthusiasts had become dupes of a Congress plot to use the Mahasabha to reach an accommodation with Jinnah and the Muslim League. At the Mahasabha’s Cawnpore session in late December 1942, Savarkar succeeded in having both his stance of no compromise with the League’s Pakistan demand and his Presidency of the Mahasabha reaffirmed. But the support Savarkar gave Sir J.P. Srivastava in resisting public pressure for his resignation from the Viceroy’s Council during Gandhi’s February-March 1943 fast, and the Mahasabha President’s vocal dissent from the call of a March 1943 Leaders’ Conference for Gandhi’s release from prison, once again placed him at odds with Mookerjee and rekindled opposition to his leadership.

A confidential 1943 memorandum drafted by Sir Jagdish Prasad, the Secretary of the Standing Committee of the Non-Party Conference, points to both the Mahasabha’s increasing prominence during the middle years of the war and the waning confidence its leadership inspired among the non-Congress right.² Prasad argued that with the Congress and Muslim League holding fast to constitutional demands that the British had declared unthinkable during the war, the Mahasabha was left as the only force around which the government could be reorganized to make it wholly “Indian.” Yet, continued Prasad, so lamentable was the Mahasabha’s leadership, the Viceroy need not collaborate with it when making the Mahasabha the pivot of his Council! “Knowing how the Mahasabha

² Sir Jagdish Prasad was a former ICS officer who rose to become Chief Secretary and then Home Minister of the United Provinces. In post-independence India, his *Praja Party* led the opposition to the abolition of zamindari tenure in UP.

works,” wrote Prasad, “it is not worthwhile insisting that it should be consulted before its representatives are chosen.”³

The following section will examine these developments in detail. It will show that Savarkar resorted to various rhetorical devices to associate the Mahasabha with the Quit India agitation, while hardening his opposition to the Congress and Gandhi. It will further show that while Mookerjee sought to steer the Mahasabha on a different course, he was not prepared to directly challenge Savarkar’s policy or leadership. In resisting Mookerjee’s attempt to align the Mahasabha more closely with the Congress, Savarkar and his supporters explicitly rejected the idea that the Mahasabha should substitute for the outlawed Congress in leading the struggle for self-rule, arguing that the Congress and the Mahasabha did not in truth share a common goal.

I: The Mahasabha’s “National Demand”

The arrest of the Congress leadership on 9 August 1942 and the subsequent eruption of social unrest across India accentuated the disarray in the Mahasabha. The *Mahratta* conceded that in the days and weeks following the outbreak of the Quit India agitation, Mahasabha offices were inundated with requests from members and supporters for clarification of the Mahasabha’s position and direction as to what they should do.⁴ Meanwhile, Savarkar’s status within the organization remained in question, although Mahasabhites bombarded his Bombay office with letters, telegrams, and resolutions urging him to withdraw his resignation from the Mahasabha presidency. Only on August

³ Confidential Memorandum of Jagdish Prasad to M.R. Jayakar, Sir T.B. Sapru, and Sir N.N. Sircar, Jayakar Papers, Microfilm Roll 130, U of T.

⁴ Eg.: “From all parts of India Hindu Sabhaites were inquiring what stand they should take regarding the Congress move for the Civil Resistance Movement,” *Mahratta*, 14 August 1942.

29, that is twenty day after mass anti-government protests had first erupted, did the Hindu Mahasabha Working Committee assemble.

After three days of deliberations, the Working Committee adopted two resolutions whose meaning would be the subject of great controversy in the Mahasabha in the weeks and months to come. The second and shorter of the resolutions condemned “the policy of repression” launched by the Government of India, deplored police violence against “inoffensive and peaceful citizens who had not taken any part in the disturbances,” and demanded the “immediate release of all national leaders who are now detained in jail.”⁵

The main resolution outlined what the Mahasabha termed its “National Demand.” Only by satisfying India’s aspirations for self-rule, affirmed the resolution, could the British and the Allies effectively mobilize India’s resources to secure military victory. At the outbreak of the war, the Mahasabha had said it would accept a British pledge to grant India Dominion status within a year of the cessation of hostilities. Now it demanded that Britain immediately declare India independent, then initiate negotiations to form an Indian national government to which all power would be transferred, subject only to such adjustments as were necessary to ensure India’s defence and an Allied victory in the war. Comprised of representatives of the principal political parties, this National Government would, at the war’s conclusion, convene a Constituent Assembly to frame a constitution “for the Indian nation.” The resolution further stipulated that if any minority was dissatisfied with the “safeguards” accorded it in the new constitution, it could refer “the matter to an Independent Tribunal whose decision will be binding ...” However, during

⁵ Maheshwar Dayal Seth, General Secretary, All-India Hindu Mahasabha, *The Mahasabha Stand Explained* (Lucknow: Pioneer Press, 1942) 5. A copy is contained in HMS C-34.

the war no party should raise "issues calculated to disrupt Indian Unity"—i.e. Pakistan—nor be permitted to obstruct the formation of the National Government.

Needless to say, the Mahasabha resolution attacked the Muslim League. But the denunciations of the League were so crafted as to also constitute an implicit condemnation of the Congress. Shortly before the All India Congress Committee adopted its Quit India resolution, Gandhi, in a bid to undercut Muslim League claims that the Congress was bent on establishing Hindu *raj*, said he would welcome the British transferring power to a League government. "This Committee," proclaimed the Mahasabha Working Committee, "records its emphatic opinion that it would be fatal to the cause of nationalism and to the ordered evolution of Free India if, as has been suggested in some quarters, the Muslim League alone with its present avowedly anti-national outlook is invited to form the Government at the Center and Hindus will never accept such a Government."⁶ Thus the Mahasabha's National Demand had a dual character. It associated the Mahasabha with the Congress demand for immediate independence, while attacking the Congress stance on Hindu-Muslim unity. In the ensuing internal conflict, one wing of the Mahasabha, led by Mookerjee, would stress the similarity between the constitutional demands of the Congress and Mahasabha, while the other emphasized the Mahasabha's antipathy to the League and the gulf between the Congress and Mahasabha positions on the communal question. Indeed, Savarkar and his supporters would ultimately label the Quit India movement as anti-Hindu and anti-national. Had not, they argued, Congress thrice betrayed *Akhand Hindusthan* in 1942? First in April, by accepting the principle of provincial self-determination, then by offering to have residuary constitutional powers vested in the provinces, and finally with Gandhi's

⁶ Dayal Seth, *The Mahsabha Stand Explained*, 3.

statement that the Congress would support the British transferring power to a Muslim League government. Savarkar in his presidential address to the Mahasabha's December 1942 all-India session, affirmed "The betrayal of Hindu rights or genuine Nationality could have gone no further. ... Were the Hindu Mahasabhaites [sic] deliberately to join a fight whose price and inevitable consequence was the vivisection of their own Motherland and Holyland?"⁷

These differences were already in evidence at the August 29-31 Working Committee meeting: "One section of leaders desired the continuance of the pro-war attitude of the Mahasabha but that the British Government should be warned against yielding to the Muslim League demand for Pakistan, another section appeared to have urged the Mahasabha to line up with the political demand of the Congress ..."⁸ The latter section wanted the Mahasabha to threaten the British with specific sanctions if they did not yield, thus further associating the Mahasabha with the now outlawed Congress. But this was the minority view. The National Demand resolution merely said that should the British government persist "in its policy of callous indifference to India's national aspirations" the Mahasabha would "have no other alternative but to revise its present programme and ... devise ways and means whereby Britain and her allies will realise that India as a self-respecting nation can no longer be suppressed."⁹

Subsequent events would show that for Savarkar there never was any question of the Hindu Mahasabha withdrawing its support for the war and breaking its alliance with the British colonial regime. In late September, when faced with pressure from within the Mahasabha for the Working Committee to make good on its threat to revise its

⁷ *Savarkar Writings*, 469-70.

⁸ *Indian Year Book* (1943-44): 831.

⁹ Dayal Seth, *The Mahasabha Stand Explained*, 4.

programme, Savarkar intimated that the Mahasabha's National Demand campaign had already achieved its purpose for it had exposed the hollowness of the British claim that they would relinquish power if India's political representatives joined together to demand self-rule. The Mahasabha, explained Savarkar, had never thought there was "the slightest" chance of the British ceding to India's wishes, no matter how many parties and organizations associated themselves with the Mahasabha's efforts to "produce a more or less united demand for independence."¹⁰ Rather the Mahasabha had mounted its National Demand campaign to "cure" Hindus of the "self-deception" that had caused them to support the Congress in its bended-knee appeals to the League—their belief "that if we but could produce ... a united scheme [for independence], then it will be simply impossible for England to refuse to grant it."¹¹

Savarkar was no doubt telling the truth when he conceded that for him the National Demand had been a ploy. Only the ploy's purpose had been to defuse internal opposition and refurbish the Mahasabha's nationalist credentials, not disabuse popular misconceptions about the character of the colonial regime. As at the Mahasabha's 1940 Madura session, where he had bowed to the wishes of the majority and threatened direct action, so at the August 1942 Working Committee meeting Savarkar made concessions to those who wanted the Mahasabha to adopt a more militant stance, the better to uphold the Mahasabha's alliance with the colonial regime. But Savarkar soon found this feint inadequate. Elements both inside and outside the Mahasabha were interpreting the Mahasabha Working Committee resolutions in a manner inimical to the Hindu nationalists' alliance with the government. "[T]o remove all misunderstandings created

¹⁰ *Mahratta*, 2 October 1942.

¹¹ *Savarkar Writings*, 476-77.

by misinformation or mischief," the Mahasabha President issued a statement September 3rd emphatically opposing the Quit India agitation and any non-cooperation with the colonial regime. The same day he telegraphed Mookerjee not to seek a meeting with Jinnah, an order he reiterated two days later, this time by letter.¹²

* * *

There is another element of the Mahasabha's "National Demand" resolution that warrants attention. The resolution established a Special Committee, chaired by Mookerjee, to popularize the Mahasabha's formula for resolving the political crisis and undertake, "if possible," negotiations with other parties and the colonial authorities. Over the next four months, Mookerjee used this Special Committee to try to steer the Mahasabha closer to the Congress and to explore the possibility of an alliance with the Muslim League. In this, the Bengali Mahasabhite leader had the support of at least two of the committee's four other regular members, N.C. Chatterjee and Mehr Chand Khanna, and of Maheshwar Dayal Seth, who sat on the committee by virtue of his being the Mahasabha General Secretary. (Savarkar was also an ex-officio member, but appears to have played no part in the committee's work.)

No sooner had the Mahasabha's August 29-31 Working Committee meeting concluded, than Mookerjee and Dayal Seth threw themselves into the work of the Special Committee, holding press conferences and meetings to trumpet the Mahsabaha's "National Demand," and appealing to leaders of rival political groupings for talks on forming a "United Front." While Mookerjee and Dayal Seth said that they did not trust the Congress to uphold "Hindu rights," they otherwise associated the Mahasabha with the

¹² Statement of V.D. Savarkar issued by the Hindu Mahasabha Presidential Office 3 September 1942, HMS C-34; *Mahratta*, 18 September 1942.

Congress demand for independence. "There is not much difference between what the Congress has demanded and what we are asking now," Mookerjee told a September 1 press conference. In urging all Indian political forces to join with the Mahasabha in demanding a "national government," Mookerjee and Dayal Seth said they would be willing to have the Pakistan question made the subject of international arbitration after the war.¹³ Arguably, this went considerably beyond their mandate, since with its Delhi resolutions the Working Committee had merely committed the Mahasabha to accepting international arbitration of a minority's complaints about the safeguards accorded it in the constitution of an independent India. But given the ambiguities in the League's Pakistan Demand, it is far from clear whether Mookerjee and Dayal Seth were themselves aware that they might be deviating from Mahasabha policy.

In any event, public attention would likely never have fallen on such subtleties had the Special Committee's efforts to press the British to "settle with India" not been warmly welcomed by much of the Indian political elite and press. Eight days after issuing a circular letter urging Indian political leaders to join with the Mahasabha in demanding that the British initiate negotiations to form a national government, Mookerjee was able to forward the Viceroy a "Joint Statement" signed by many prominent non-Congress/non-League leaders, including the best known Sikh communal politicians and the Chief Ministers of two of the five provinces where responsible government was ostensibly still in operation.¹⁴ The Mahasabha's initiative also enjoyed the editorial support of much of the Indian-owned press, and not just "moderate" voices like the *Leader*, but also newspapers such as the *Tribune* and the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*

¹³ Dayal Seth, *The Mahsabha Stand Explained*, 7 and 21.

¹⁴ Dayal Seth, *The Mahsabha Stand Explained*, 15-16.

that were generally supportive of the Congress. Much of the favorable press commentary echoed the claims of Mookerjee and Dayal Seth that the INC's and Mahasabha's constitutional demands were essentially the same.¹⁵ Such commentary ignored the organizations' radically different definitions of the Indian polity and the awkward fact that the Mahasabha, despite its threat to review its current policy, remained allied with the government. One reason elements in and around the Congress welcomed the Mahasabha's National Demand campaign is that they saw it as undercutting the British effort, in India and especially overseas, to portray the Congress as completely alone in demanding an immediate transfer of power. Alarmed by both the scope and vigor of the British campaign of repression and the radical tenor of the Quit India agitation, many also clutched at the faint hope that the Mahasabha-initiative might open an avenue for reviving negotiations with the colonial regime.

That the Mahasabha initiative would receive such a warm reception from a broad cross-section of the political elite had clearly not been anticipated by Savarkar and, one suspects, by the Mahsabha leadership as a whole. In establishing the Special Committee, the Working Committee had mandated it to conduct negotiations with other parties and the government "if possible," which suggests the resolution's framers were uncertain whether the National Demand campaign would have any impact beyond the Mahasabha and its periphery. Moonje later conceded that the Committee's attempt to rally cross-party support for an Indian national government had "succeed[ed] beyond expectation."¹⁶

¹⁵ See press commentary reproduced in Dayal Seth, *The Mahsabha Stand Explained*.

¹⁶ *Mahratta*, 2 February 1943.

Mookerjee met with the Viceroy September 9 to discuss the Mahasabha's proposals.¹⁷ That the audience with Linlithgow constituted recognition of the Mahasabha's new prominence is underscored by the Viceroy's earlier refusal to receive Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, the President of the Standing Committee of the Non-Party Conference and an esteemed "moderate" who in the past had assisted the colonial authorities in seeking accommodations with the Congress.

The next day, the Special Committee issued a "Joint Statement of Indian Political Leaders." Among the initial signatories were: Sir S. Radikrishnan, the Vice-Chancellor of Benares University (and future President of India); the Muslim Chief Ministers of Bengal and Sind, respectively Fazlul Huq and Allah Buksh; the General Secretary of the Azad Muslim Board, Dr. Ansari; the President of the All-India Momin Conference, Muhammad Zaher-ud-Din; the Nawab of Dacca; Master Tara Singh, the President of the Shiromoni Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee; and Sardar Baldeo Singh, a Sikh minister in Punjab's Unionist-led government.¹⁸ The Joint Statement called for the establishment of a "National Government pledged to the support of the War against the aggressors consisting of representatives of major political interests with completed [*sic*] autonomy in the internal administration during the period of the War and unfettered freedom thereafter ...". It also said that consideration of "controversial issues" should be postponed till the war's end.¹⁹ But the Statement differed from the Mahasabha's National Demand Resolution in three important respects: it ignored how the constitution of an independent India would be formulated and thus the thorny question of how any dissent from the

¹⁷ Linlithgow to Amery, 10 September 1942, *TOP*, 2: 930-31.

¹⁸ Dayal Seth, *The Mahasabha Stand Explained*, 16. Sir Kunwar Maharaj Singh, a UP legislator and prominent spokesman of India's Christian community, was among a host of others who subsequently signed the statement.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

minorities would be dealt with; it did not criticize either the Congress or Muslim League; and it contained no threat, however oblique, that the signatories might actively oppose the colonial regime and its war effort.

On September 11, Mookerjee had a three-hour interview with Jinnah. The next issue of the *Mahratta* trumpeted a report that claimed Mookerjee had met Jinnah “only in a personal capacity” and that “the Hindu Mahasabha negotiations sub-committee is proceeding with its work without any reference to Mr. Jinnah.”²⁰ But the Acting Mahasabha Working President did in fact take steps to continue exploring the possibility of a Mahasabha-League alliance. Mookerjee delegated Dayal Seth to solicit from Jinnah the League’s conditions for supporting the call for an immediate transfer of power to a national government.²¹ Mookerjee’s choice of Dayal Seth had less to do with his position as Mahasabha General Secretary than his intimate connections to the Muslim elite of UP, the traditional backbone of the League. A *taluqdar* and former officer of the *taluqdars’* British Indian Association of Oudh, Maheshwar Dayal had arranged for Mookerjee to meet Jinnah through a mutual friend—the Muslim League General Secretary Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan.²²

Around this time, Mookerjee informed the Viceroy that he had secured the support of two prominent Congress dissidents, K.M. Munshi and C. Rajagopalachari.²³ A former Bombay Home Minister, Munshi had quit the Congress in June 1941 after clashing with Gandhi over whether the Congress should sanction Hindus training for, and

²⁰ *Mahratta*, 18 September 1942.

²¹ *IAR*, II, 1944: 59-61. See also Khaliqzaman, *Pathway to Pakistan* (London: Longmans Green, 1961) 286 and 315 and K.M. Munshi, *Indian Constitutional Documents, Vol. 1, Pilgrimage to Freedom (1920-50)*, (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1967) 83-84.

²² *Mahratta*, 18 September 1942.

²³ *TOP*, 2: 960.

mounting, “self-defence” during communal riots. He then founded an *Akhand Hindusthan* Front to spearhead opposition to Pakistan. Rajagopalachari, by contrast, might appear a strange Mahasabha bedfellow. The former Chief Minister of Madras had repeatedly urged the Congress to reach an accommodation with Jinnah, and in April 1942 he had gotten the Congress members of the Madras Assembly to adopt a resolution calling on the Congress to concede the Muslim League’s Pakistan demand. But Rajagopalachari, like Munshi and the Mahasabahites, was apprehensive at the growth of socialist sentiment in the Indian national movement and favored cooperation with the imperial power over a frontal assault and social disorder. (In the 1960s, Munshi, Rajagopalachari and a smattering of ex-Hindu Mahasabhites would combine in the Swatantra Party, an avowedly right-wing party that was supported by sections of big business and remnants of the princely and landlord orders.) “You can command my services where and when” needed, wrote Rajagopalachari to Mookerjee.²⁴ Munshi, for his part, welcomed the Mahasabha’s National Demand initiative, saying that it signified the Mahasabha had, “in the absence of the Congress, become the leader of the national leader movement.”

If the Congress win swaraj, the Hindu Mahasabha will survive as the instrument of Hindu cultural power. If Pakistan is forced on India, the Hindu Mahasabha will be a National organization of Hindu India and the spearhead of Indian integrity.

The Sabha, however, has not been able to fulfill this destiny, partly because it has chosen to be more **anti-Muslim than British, and at places, almost as anti-Congress as anti-Muslim.**

But in passing the resolution it did at Delhi ...[t]he Hindu Mahasabha has stepped out of its narrower into its wider aspect. I can only wish it godspeed.²⁵

²⁴ Rajagopalachari to Mookerjee, undated, HMS C-34.

²⁵ *Mahratta*, 18 September 1942. Emphasis mine.

Earlier we noted that elements in and around the Congress right-wing, including the Congress dissidents K.M. Munshi and C.R. Rajagopalachari, lent support to the Mahasabha's National Demand campaign because they believed that it undercut British attempts to isolate the Congress and because they saw it as providing a channel through which constitutional negotiations could potentially be reopened. But why did so many Indian political leaders outside the Congress current—moderates, and Sikh, Muslim and Christian political leaders—make common cause with the Mahasabha and sign the Joint Statement?

The obvious explanation is that the Statement provided the non-Congress/non-League politicians with an all-India "nationalist" platform that distanced them from the colonial regime and its vigorous repression of the Congress. We have already had occasion to consider the scope and tenacity of the Quit India movement, but Linlithgow's characterization bears repeating—it was the greatest challenge to British rule since 1857. Non-Congress politicians, especially those in government, feared being tarred as supporters of the British *Raj*. Jinnah's agitation for Pakistan and condemnation of the Quit India movement as anti-Muslim made it all the more important for Muslim politicians like Fazlul Huq and Allah Basksh to be identified with an independent, all-India platform.

Valid as this explanation is, I would argue it needs to be supplemented for it does not give due attention to the temper of the times. The onrush of events in 1942 had dismayed and frightened large sections of India's economic and political elite. At a time when the Japanese army was on India's doorstep and the country was increasingly beset

by shortages of essential goods, the Congress had resorted to the “barren” and socially incendiary policy of mass civil disobedience. The Muslim League meanwhile remained adamant in pressing its “impossible” Pakistan demand. Last but not least, there was the stance adopted by India’s colonial overlords. British hypocrisy and intransigence were widely seen to have goaded the Congress down the path of confrontation, strengthened the radical element in the nationalist movement, and opened the door to anarchy. I would submit that fear of the increasing political polarization and exasperation at their own impotence were key reasons disparate elite elements rallied behind the Mahasabha’s national government initiative and sought to use it to pressure the colonial authorities to conciliate, not repress, the popular demand for political change. Mookerjee himself explicitly warned that British intransigence was stoking social upheaval. “We are heading towards a big crisis,” Mookerjee told a press conference in Lahore on September 4, 1942. “Things are changing with surprising suddenness and, maybe, if matters are allowed to develop, it would be difficult even for Mahatma Gandhi to control the situation.”²⁶ In this regard, it is important to underline that, much as there was talk of the affinity between the INC’s Quit India demand and the Mahasabha’s campaign for the British to “settle with India,” the Mahasabha’s call for an ordered transfer of power was an implicit condemnation of the Congress movement, and not just as it had unfolded following the arrest of the Congress leaders.

Mookerjee in a July 26, 1942 letter to the Bengal Governor expressly criticized the INC’s call for the British to Quit India, saying it “discloses considerable loose thinking.”

²⁶ Dayal Seth, *The Mahasabha Stand Explained*, 9.

If the British withdraw without an agreement as to who will assume power, "chaos and civil war will ensue almost immediately."²⁷

Before resuming our narrative we have one further question to ponder. To what end did Mookerjee strive to rally the Indian political elite behind the demand for a national transitional government?

The Viceroy, in reporting to Amery on his September 1942 interview with Mookerjee, dismissed the Bengali Mahasabha's campaign to mobilize support for a national government as a play for cabinet seats:

I need only add that his argument was the usual one—that if the Muslim League would not play, and the Congress for whatever reason would not play, we ought to give the vacant seats to those who would support us; in other words, the Mahasabha; and that if we did not we were ruining any confidence left in us in the minds of the progressive parties here.²⁸

Unquestionably, there were Mahasabhites who were supporting the National Demand initiative because they hoped that the British could be prodded into bringing the Mahasabha into a pro-war, "anti-Congress," "national" government along the lines Linlithgow had himself suggested in discussions with his Council the previous month. Mahasabha General Secretary Maheshwar Dayal admitted as much when he told a press conference in the midst of the Quit India upheaval that although personally he was against it, the Mahasabha would probably agree to joining a composite provisional government without the Congress.²⁹

But Mookerjee's game, as underscored by his repeated requests for permission to interview the Congress leadership, was more complex. He feared for the credibility of the Mahasabha and all prospects for forging an understanding between it and the Congress in

²⁷ S.P. Mookerjee to Sir John Herbert, 26 July 1942. reproduced in S.P. Mookerjee, *Diary*, 182.

²⁸ Linlithgow to Amery 10 September 1942, *TOP*, 2: 931.

²⁹ Dayal Seth, *Mahasabha Stand Explained*, 22.

Bengal, if the breach between the Mahasabha and Congress grew any wider. At the same time, he feared for the future of the Mahasabha-supported Huq Ministry. Hence Mookerjee, hedged his bets. He penned a letter of “resignation” and posted it to the Viceroy, but remained Bengal’s Finance Ministry.

At the same time, by rallying support for an ordered transfer of power, Mookerjee sought to interject the Mahasabha between the Congress and the British. In effect, he tried to boost the Mahasabha’s stature and leverage by making it an interlocutor. To the British, he offered the Mahasabha’s services as a brake on the Congress, to help steer it back onto the path of a negotiated and staggered transfer of power; to the Congress, he offered fresh negotiations with the *Raj* as a cover and an inducement to retreat from its posture of extra-constitutional opposition to the established political order. And had Mookerjee been able to form a pact with Jinnah, he would have further enhanced his bargaining position *vis à vis* both the Congress and government, and potentially found a new means of constraining his adversaries in the Bengal Muslim League.

This said, it is important to insist on both the fluidity of the political situation and the inherent ambiguity of Mookerjee’s position. Savarkar, no less than Mookerjee, was buffeted by the cascade of events, but, stemming from his ideology of *Hindutva*, he had a fixed attitude of hostility toward the Congress. Savarkar aimed for the Mahasabha to supplant the Congress; Mookerjee conceived of their playing a complementary role, with the Mahasabha serving to pressure the Congress to defend the “rights of Hindus” from attack, whether by Muslim communal politicians or impoverished Muslim peasants, and

to uphold the innate wisdom of Hindu tradition against left-wing, “foreign” ideologies.

“[B]oth the parties were needed equally ...,” he affirmed.³⁰

Blinded by his own class/communal interests, Mookerjee appears to have had only a hazy understanding of Savarkar’s objective of constituting a long-term Anglo-Hindu alliance. Writing in 1946, Mookerjee observed that Savarkar had repeatedly frustrated calls for the Mahasabha to take a more militant stance against the colonial authorities. “Perhaps he believed that our supporters could help us form a government, and that this would give us the strength to tackle the work later.”³¹

Mookerjee’s attitude toward the Quit India movement was shot through with ambivalence. He had thought the INC’s launching of the Quit India agitation ill-advised. Then, when social unrest had shaken India, he pressed for the Mahasabha to associate itself with the Congress demand for an immediate transfer of power and to take a more oppositional stance toward the government. While deploring the excessive zeal with which the British suppressed the Quit India movement, he also upheld the government’s right to use force to restore order. “[I]t is the duty of any Government,” asserted Mookerjee, “to see that acts of lawlessness are not committed or that disturbances are not created during this grave emergency ...”³² Subsequently, Mookerjee became convinced that not only had it been an error for the Congress to have launched a direct challenge to British rule in August 1942, but also that the Congress and Mahasabha should never have rejected the Cripps Offer.³³

³⁰ S.P. Mookerjee, *Diary*, 111.

³¹ S.P. Mookerjee, *Diary*, 107.

³² S.P. Mookerjee to Sir John Herbert, 16 November 1942. Reproduced in S.P. Mookerjee *Diary*, 207..

³³ S.P. Mookerjee, *Diary*, 64-65.

When Mookerjee met with the Viceroy, he requested permission to interview Gandhi. Subsequently, the Mahasabha's Special Committee claimed that if it was to advance in its efforts to find a negotiated settlement it urgently needed to consult with the Congress leadership.³⁴

The Viceroy flatly refused. He would brook no suggestion that the government retreat from its policy of pacifying the country and relegating all constitutional bargaining till after the war. To be sure, Linlithgow recognized that the British could not permanently suppress the Congress. But for the moment he had one overriding objective—to stamp out Congress agitation so as to ensure that the British war effort was unimpeded. Anything that hindered this objective, that even appeared to lend support to or boost the Congress, was anathema for Linlithgow.

Thus from the beginning, the Viceroy was anxious to derail the Mookerjee-led National Demand campaign. When he met the Mahasabha Working President, he did so resolved to reject Mookerjee's proposal that the Mahasabha intercede with the Congress. Linlithgow's stand foreshadowed the attitude the colonial regime would adopt toward Mookerjee in 1945 when the question of his representing the Mahasabha at the Simla constitutional conference arose. The British had little interest in patronizing a Mahasabha that, at least to their thinking, was in the tow of the Congress

Whereas in the past, Linlithgow had been wont to exaggerate Mahasabha strength, he was quick to dismisses the cross-communal support for the Mahasabha initiative, saying it came from "odd sections of the Muslims."³⁵ In fact, the Muslim support for the

³⁴ TOP, 2: 931; *The Mahasabha Stand Explained*, 18.

³⁵ TOP, 2, 931.

Joint Statement pointed to the erroneous, self-interested character of Linlithgow's claims that the Muslim League alone counted. In 1942, Jinnah and the League were still far from having secured a position of unassailable dominance among the Muslim political elite.

In reporting to the Secretary of State for India on his brusque dismissal of Mookerjee, the Viceroy observed that there was "considerable internal dissension in [the] Mahasabha camp." Linlithgow was well-informed. Many a pro-Congress paper was more enthusiastic in its praise and promotion of the Mahasabha National Demand campaign than the *Mahratta*. The *Pioneer*, which was partly owned by Sir J.P. Srivastava, urged that all constitutional discussion, not just the Pakistan Demand, be shelved till the war's end. Declared a *Pioneer* editorial, "Instead of fencing with the British Government, or asking at the outset for the fulfillment of demands which are strongly opposed by powerful elements, [the Mahasabha] should bring to bear an open and tolerant mind. It has long prided itself on its 'realism.' It must now live up to its creed."³⁶

The divisions within the Mahasabha hardened following Mookerjee's meeting with Jinnah. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that Savarkar and the Viceroy worked in tandem to scuttle Mookerjee's efforts to forge a Mahasabha-League alliance and force a return to the constitutional bargaining table. One might have thought Savarkar would have welcomed negotiations with the Muslim League, since they could be construed as implying recognition of the Mahasabha's claim to be the third force in Indian politics, if not the authoritative voice of the Hindus. From the mid-1920s, the Mahasabha had been insisting that it, not the Congress, was the rightful body to conduct any communal negotiations with the League. Yet from the outset, Savarkar tried to discourage the

³⁶ *The Pioneer* 2 September 1942 as reproduced in *The Mahasabha Stand Explained*, 35. See also the extract from *The Pioneer* of 8 September 1942, on 49.

Special Committee from approaching Jinnah and his opposition only grew stronger when he saw elements associated with the “pseudo-nationalist” Congress, most notably Rajagopalachari, coming into closer contact with the Mahasabha and lending their support to its National Demand campaign. Three months hence, in his Cawnpore presidential address, Savarkar would declare that “the real danger” to India’s integrity came from “Pakistani Hindus” and accuse Rajagopalachari of promoting India’s vivisection “with more sincerity and perverse fanaticism than any mad-Mullah known to history.”³⁷

Linlithgow’s refusal to allow Mookerjee to interview Gandhi and the colonial regime’s success in suppressing the Quit India agitation took much of the wind out of the sails of the Mahasabha’s National Demand campaign. By the end of September, Savarkar and his supporters were declaring the campaign a propaganda victory for the Mahasabha, the better to give it a quick burial. Mookerjee, meanwhile, pressed for the Mahasabha to act on the Working Committee’s threat to revise its policy, since the British had manifestly refused to initiate discussions on forming a “national government.” The Working Committee of the Bengal Provincial Hindu Sabha passed a resolution urging the all-India organization to change its attitude to the government and, in an internal report to the party leadership, the Mahasabha Special Committee made a like recommendation.³⁸

The lines were sharply drawn at the October 3-5 Mahasabha Working Committee meeting. On the meeting’s first day B.G. Khaparde, a prominent supporter of Savarkar and fellow Maharashtran, moved a resolution that condemned the Congress for having made repeated overtures to the Muslim League in the run-up to the Quit India agitation.

³⁷ *Savarkar Writings*, 484-85.

³⁸ *Mahratta*, 2 October 1942; Report of the Special Committee Appointed by the Working Committee of the All India Hindu Mahasabha at Delhi on 31st July [*sic*], 1942, HMS C-34.

The resolution termed Gandhi's statement that the Congress would welcome the British transferring power to the Muslim League as "most unjust, anti-national, and absolutely detrimental to the legitimate interests of the Hindus."³⁹

Khaparde's resolution was a patent attempt to derail Mookerjee's efforts by placing a wedge between the Mahasabha and both the Congress and the League. But the debate over the resolution also served to test the strength of the Mahasabha's rival camps before the substantive issue of the Special Committee's report came before the Working Committee.

After "considerable discussion," Savarkar made a tactical retreat. He let Khaparde's resolution be tabled; then in the debate over the Special Committee's report made "strong insistence that the negotiation[s] with the Muslim League and Mr. Jinnah being inconclusive ... should continue."⁴⁰ What lay behind the Mahasabha President's sudden shift? Had Savarkar been converted to the view that the Mahasabha should seek a compromise with the League over its Pakistan Demand? Hardly. Only a few weeks hence, he would again be pressing for the cessation of all negotiations with the League. But if Savarkar was opposed to talks with Jinnah, he was even more resolutely opposed to the Mahasabha abandoning its alliance with the colonial regime and its support for the war. He clutched at the "inconclusive" negotiations with Jinnah as a means of temporizing pressure for the Mahasabha to act on its threat to revise its program and align itself with the Congress opposition.

The compromise resolution unanimously passed at the conclusion of the Working Committee meeting emphasized anew the Mahasabha's commitment to the war, saying

³⁹ Working Committee Proceeding 3-5 October 1942, HMS C-61.

⁴⁰ Maheshwar Dayal to Savarkar 14 January 1943, SPM Papers, II-IV Installment, File 57.

that the Mahasabha had raised its National Demand so as to convert the “war into a genuine People’s War.” It suggested, as had many previous Mahasabha resolutions, that the Hindu Sanagthanists might soon be called upon to challenge the colonial regime. But the nub of the resolution was that the Mahasabha would persist with its “negotiations and discussions” with other political parties, even though the resolution observed that the British had made it abundantly clear that they had “no intention of parting with power...”⁴¹

In hailing the meeting’s outcome, the *Mahratta* said the Working Committee had rightly resisted pressure from two pro-Congress groups “outside the Mahasabha.” One group had wanted the Mahasabha to plunge “headlong into the present sporadic disturbances, violence and sabotage;” the other had urged the Mahasabha leadership to abandon *Akhand Hindusthan*, in the hopes that that Mahasabha could then forge an alliance with the Muslim League to press for a national government. Among the key leaders of the latter group, the *Mahratta* counted K.M. Munshi who had attended the Mahasabha deliberations at Savarkar’s invitation.⁴²

Mookerjee was disheartened by the outcome of the Working Committee meeting and in correspondence with at least one Mahasabhite suggested he might resign from the organization. “Any self-respecting person would have felt the same;” replied Harish Chandra, “but ‘the parting of ways’ ... using your own phrase” is not the solution.⁴³

Mookerejee’s disappointment was genuine. His position, however, was riddled with contradictions. Had the Mahasabha ceased cooperating with the colonial regime or announced a date on which it would do so, most of the signatories of the Joint Statement

⁴¹ Working Committee Proceeding 3-5 October 1942, HMS C-61.

⁴² *Mahratta*, 16 October 1942.

⁴³ Harish Chandra to Mookerjee 4 December 1943, SPM Papers, II-IV Installment, File 57.

would have dissented and the Mahasabha's negotiations with the Muslim League would have collapsed. Last but not least, there were the divisions within the Mahasabha itself. Aside from Savarkar and his Maharashtran supporters, there were many other powerful elements in the Mahasabha that were militantly anti-Congress. In 1945 many of the most eminent Mahasabhites chose to quit the organization rather than abide by Mookerjee's order that they forsake their government-bestowed titles.

In Bengal, Mookerjee found himself caught between his dual objectives of pursuing close ties with the Congress, so as to better maintain popular support and position the Mahasabha to influence Congress policy, and following a course dictated by the more immediate needs of the communal political struggle. On November 16, 1942, Mookerjee finally made good on his August 12th "resignation" from the provincial government, citing as his reasons Britain's refusal to part with power, the brutal suppression of the Quit India movement in Bengal's Midnapore district, and the provincial governor's sabotage of responsible government.⁴⁴ Yet even in resigning, Mookerjee was at pains to insist that he continued to support Fazl Huq's coalition ministry and steadfastly defended his former cabinet colleagues when they came under attack for not following his example: "There was a great feeling in the country that the other Hindu ministers at least should have resigned. But I explained the peculiar situation in which Bengal was placed and urged that the present ministry was better than a League Ministry."⁴⁵

⁴⁴ The colonial authorities proscribed a pamphlet that reproduced Mookerjee's letter of resignation, S.P. Mookerjee, *A Phase of the Indian Struggle* (Nadia, Bengal: Monojendra N. Bhowmik, 1942). However, when the Bengal Legislative Assembly resumed sitting in February, 1943, Mookerjee was able to use his parliamentary privileges to read out a prepared statement, "Why I resigned." Both Mookerjee's letter of resignation and his statement are included in the appendices to S.P. Mookerjee, *Leaves from a Diary* (ed. Ashim Kumar Datta, Oxford: OUP, 1993.)

⁴⁵ S.P. Mookerjee, *Leaves from a Diary*, ed., Ashim Kumar Datta (Oxford: OUP, 1993) 85.

II: Independence or the “higher ideal” of *Hindu Rashtra*?

Neither Savarkar nor the *Mahratta* publicly questioned Mookerjee’s decision to resign from the Bengal cabinet, but their policy pronouncements were implicitly critical. In his presidential address to the Mahasabha’s December 1942 session, Savarkar lauded Mookerjee while promoting participation in the *Raj*’s governmental machinery as the key to making the Mahasabha a potent political force. Proclaimed Savarkar:

The Hindu Mahasabha through its elected or supported representatives has now come to occupy responsible positions in political councils, committees, ministries, legislatures, municipalities and other centers of political power and it is this fact which has **pre-eminently contributed** to the outstanding political importance which the Mahasabha ... has come to attain throughout India ... ⁴⁶

To quiet a restless rank and file and rebut Congress charges that the Mahasabha was betraying the struggle for home rule, Savarkar and his supporters were compelled to flesh out their reasons for opposing the Quit India agitation. Making a virtue out of necessity, they soon invoked their willingness to “boldly face all criticism and odium” for having defied popular nationalist sentiment as proof of the Mahasabha’s courage and its commitment to principle.⁴⁷

The Mahasabha’s ruling faction argued that the Quit India movement was *inopportune*, since it cut across the Mahasabha’s efforts to get Hindus to obtain military training by joining the armed forces and civil defence bodies. As each passing week brought further proof of the success of the government’s pacification program, *The Mahratta* also became more confident in asserting that it had been folly for the Congress to think that the British could be pressured into ceding home rule. “Whatever can be achieved—by way of willing or unwilling concession from the Government by non-

⁴⁶ *Savarkar Writings*, 473. Emphais added.

⁴⁷ *Mahratta*, 11 December 1942.

violent or even violent 'moral' pressure has already been achieved," it declared in early November.⁴⁸

The Mahasabhites criticized the Quit India movement for employing the *wrong method*. Significantly, this criticism encompassed more than just Gandhian civil disobedience. Savarkar and the *Mahratta*, notwithstanding their promotion of a Maharashtran martial tradition, scathing criticism of Gandhi's doctrine of *ahmisa* (non-violence), and praise of communal violence when directed against Muslims, condemned the damage wrought by pro-Congress crowds and the sabotage and killings perpetrated by the nationalist underground as "hooliganism." The question of violence also figured in two arguments that the Mahasabhites made as to why their organization should refrain from involvement in the Quit India movement: since the agitation had taken a violent turn to associate with it now would make the Mahasabha liable to the charge that it was condoning violence; were the Mahasabha to join the anti-*Raj* rising, the Congress leadership would exploit the Mahasabha's well-known opposition to the doctrine of *ahmisa* to pin the blame for the violence perpetrated in the name of the Quit India movement on the Hindu nationalists.⁴⁹ That these arguments contradicted one another serves only to underscore how determined the Mahasabhites were not to be drawn into the Congress-initiated challenge to British rule.

Last but not least, Savarkar and his supporters argued that the Quit India movement was for the *wrong cause*, that it did not have true Indian independence as its goal and this for two reasons. First, the agitation was initiated by and meant to strengthen the hand of the Congress, an organization that had repeatedly betrayed the Hindu cause

⁴⁸ *Mahratta*, 6 November 1942.

⁴⁹ *Mahratta*, 12 March 1943.

and would do so again in order to curry favor with the Muslims. Second, the movement did not truly challenge foreign domination since the Congress leadership had said Britain and the U.S. could keep their troops in India for the duration of the war so as to ensure India's defence and boost the Allied cause.

In short, the war-cry of the Congress movement came to "*Quit India but keep the British army here and the Americans to boot!!*" And the price of the movement for Indian independence was the vivisection of Indian integrity!⁵⁰

Thus, while Jinnah and the Muslim League opposed the Quit India movement on the grounds that the true aim of the Congress was to establish a Hindu *Raj*, the Mahasabha's dominant faction condemned it as a way-station to Pakistan.

Many of the Mahasabhites' arguments suggested that their organization and the Congress were marching on parallel paths toward a common goal. Keenly aware of the extent to which the Quit India movement had captured the popular imagination, Savarkar would criticize the agitation in one breath, then try to identify the Mahasabha with it in the next. Even the British government had had to concede, said Savarkar, that the Quit India struggle "was essentially the struggle of the people for the freedom of their country. If that be a guilt, then we have all been participating in it and are proud to be guilty of it."⁵¹

Yet the crisis that the popular challenge to British rule engendered within the Mahasabha ultimately compelled the Hindu nationalists to emphasize that their organization could not act in Congress's stead, since the Mahasabha and the Congress had different diagnoses of India's plight and prescriptions for her future. Newcomers to the Mahasabha, cautioned the *Mahratta*, did not appreciate that the Indian political

⁵⁰ *Savarkar Writings*, 468.

⁵¹ Savarkar, *Hindu Rashtra*, 198.

struggle was not a clash between a subject people and an alien colonial regime, but rather a three-cornered fight.

From a very superficial view the Mahasabha appears to be an organisation parallel to the Congress.⁵²

But to a Hindu Sabhaite political rights are a means to an end. The end is consolidation and revival of the Hindu Rashtra. . . . Mahasabha leaders and workers have to reserve their strength mainly for that purpose.⁵³

The *Mahratta*'s claim that for Congress political independence—defined in the strictest sense as a government led and staffed by Indians—was an end in itself, cannot pass muster. Over the course of decades, the Congress had been compelled to elaborate a program based on the principle that political power should reside with the Indian people and which sought to demonstrate how responsible government could translate into meaningful socio-economic change for India's masses. Here is not the place to interrogate whether Congress claims to advance a national project in the interests of all classes were true or masked the drive to power of an indigenous capitalist and professional elite. What is significant is that the *Mahratta* counterposed to the Congress national project the "higher ideal" of Hindu *Rashtra* or *Hindutva*.

And what was the content of this higher ideal? Savarkar frequently extolled the princely states and the autocratic Kingdom of Nepal as the citadels of Hindudom. Other times, he depicted a Hindu polity as a regimented, militarized industrial state. Drawing inspiration from fascist Europe, Savarkar spoke of national consolidation in spartan terms—as something brought about through regimentation and centralization—not the creation of a polity of citizens enjoying common civil rights and a modicum of social equality. Under the editorship of G.V. Ketkar, the *Mahratta* presented *Hindutva* as a

⁵² *Mahratta*, 4 December 1942.

⁵³ *Mahratta*, 20 November 1942.

conservative, hierarchical ideology that rooted society in its indigenous traditions. Here *Hindutva* could readily coincide with a defence of the caste system as India's organic, purportedly non-competitive social structure.

III: The Mahasabha-Muslim League Negotiations

Through the fall of 1942 Mookerjee persisted in his attempt to bring about an understanding with Jinnah and the Muslim League. Ultimately this endeavour faltered, not least because of the combined opposition of Savarkar and Viceroy Linlithgow.

In seeking agreement with the League, Mookerjee had the ostensible support of the Non-Party Leaders' Conference, to whose Standing Committee he had accepted appointment in 1941 at Savarkar's urging.⁵⁴ Mookerjee's enlisting of "moderate" support was in keeping with the mandate of the Mahasabha Special Committee, but one suspects that he hoped to use the Conference to overcome resistance from Savarkar and other Hindu communal hardliners. If this was the case, Mookerjee miscalculated. Powerful elements in the Non-Party Conference beginning with its Vice President, M.R. Jayakar, and its Secretary, Jagdish Prasad, were working behind the scenes to scuttle any compromise with the Muslim League.⁵⁵

With "the help of" a "common friend"—Muslim League General Secretary Liaqat Ali Khan—Mahasabha General Secretary Maheshwar Dayal obtained Jinnah's terms for a communal settlement. (Or at least Mookerjee's emissary thought he had. In the summer of 1944, after Maheshwar Dayal made public the League terms given him in 1942, Jinnah denied ever authorizing anyone to negotiate with the Mahasabha General

⁵⁴ Savarkar to Jagdish Prasad, 31 March 1941, Jayakar Papers, File 709, Microfilm Roll 123, U of T.

⁵⁵ Jagdish Prasad to M.R. Jayakar, 2 October and 6 October 1942, Jayakar Papers, File 628, Microfilm Roll 109, U of T.

Secretary.⁵⁶) In any event, Savarkar wanted none of it. He ordered Maheshwar Dayal to break off all negotiations with the League, boycotted the meeting of the Non-Party Conference Standing Committee at which Maheshwar Dayal outlined Jinnah's terms, and refused to grant the Mahasabha General Secretary a private interview during the Mahasabha's Cawnpore session.⁵⁷ "[Y]ou should have at least heard the terms offered by the Muslim League for settlement," complained Maheshwar Dayal. "It was quite open to you to reject them, but I was never given an opportunity to report these terms to you."⁵⁸

Savarkar's supporters, if not the Mahasabha President himself, accused Maheshwar Dayal of bowing to Jinnah's demand for Pakistan. In a letter explaining his 29 December 1942 resignation from the post of Mahasabha General Secretary, Maheshwar Dayal wrote:

It was widely and mischievously alleged against me particularly and also Dr. Shyma Prasad Mookerjee that we have conceded the principle of Pakistan to Mr. Jinnah ... Nothing could be further from the truth. ... I only got the terms for settlement from Mr. Jinnah ...⁵⁹

The Mahasabha President insinuated that Maheshwar Dayal was part of a Congress conspiracy to "waylay" the Mahasabha. Indeed, Savarkar claimed it was the need to frustrate this conspiracy that caused him to go back on his decision to retire from the Mahasabha leadership and seek a fresh mandate in the Mahasabha's November-December 1942 presidential election.⁶⁰

In taking exception to Savarkar's 18 November 1942 letter instructing him to "leave the League alone," Maheshwar Dayal argued that if the Mahasabha was to be a

⁵⁶ *IAR*, II, 1940: 59-61

⁵⁷ Savarkar to Maheshwar Dayal, 18 November 1942, Maheshwar Dayal to N.C. Chatterjee 20 November 1942, Maheshwar Dayal to Savarkar, 14 January 1943, SPM Papers, II-IV Installment, File 57.

⁵⁸ Maheshwar Dayal to Savarkar, 14 January 1943, SPM Papers, II-IV Installment, File 57.

⁵⁹ Maheshwar Dayal to Savarkar, 14 January 1943, SPM Papers, II-IV Installment, File 57.

⁶⁰ *Savarkar Writings*, 462.

significant political player it would have to do business with the League. Actually, the Mahasabha President was not averse to all dealings with the League. Even as he was working to torpedo the Special Committee's negotiations with Jinnah, Savarkar was urging Sindhi Mahasabhites to support the new Muslim League-led ministry in Sind and to embrace its two Hindu Ministers as Hindu Mahasabha representatives.⁶¹ Savarkar was indifferent to the fact that the previous Sind Ministry had fallen because the Governor, acting on Linlithgow's instructions, had sacked the Premier for renouncing his *Raj*-bestowed titles. Allah Bux's dismissal was a grievous abuse of the Governor's prerogative.⁶² Moreover, as a signatory of the Mahasabha's National Demand, Bux was an ostensible Mahasabha ally. Yet Savarkar viewed the events in Sind not as an affront to India's nationalist aspirations, but as an opportunity to make the Mahasabha the League's junior partner in governing Sind.

It might appear paradoxical that Savarkar was championing a League-Mahasabha coalition in Sind, while vehemently opposing talks with the League's All-India President. Savarkar's stance, however, did have an underlying logic—his support for the *Raj*. The Mahasabha's participation in the League-led Sind ministry corresponded with the objectives of India's colonial overlords, who for reasons of domestic peace and international propaganda favored inter-communal ministries. What Savarkar would not countenance was an attempt to forge a Mahasabha-League alliance on an anti-British platform.

Given the Mahasabha's animus toward Muslims and the Muslim League, it is hardly surprising that many Mahasabhites shared Savarkar's apprehensions about the

⁶¹ *Mahratta*, 20 November 1942; *Savarkar Writings*, 479-480.

⁶² A.I. Singh, 91; *Leader* 13 October 1942.

Bux is also written Baksh.

Special Committee's negotiations with Jinnah. The *Mahratta* attributed Savarkar's resounding victory in the Mahasabha's presidential election to a revolt of the Mahasabhites of north India against the Mahasabha-League talks. Opposition to any concession to the League was especially strong in the Punjab, and not only because the province was the geo-political pivot of the League's Pakistan scheme. Punjab's communal conundrum was complicated by the existence of a state-recognized Sikh minority whose elite wielded considerable political and economic power. The Mahasabha's secret, bilateral talks with Jinnah, alarmed the Sikh Akali Dal, throwing a wrench in the Mahasabha's longstanding effort to forge a Hindu-Sikh political bloc. Fearing their interests were being ignored in the Mahasabha-Muslim League negotiations, Sikh communal political leaders held their own talks with Jinnah when he toured the Punjab in November 1942. This in turn led Punjab's urban Hindu elite, which was still seething over a pact that the Akali Dal had struck with the Muslim-dominated Unionist Ministry the previous June (the Sikander-Baldev Singh Pact), to worry that the Sikhs might make a second deal at the expense of the Hindu communal cause.⁶³

In the second week of December 1942, a meeting convened by the Non-Party Conference's Standing Committee and attended by leading Mahasabhites, Master Tara Singh, and Congress dissident C.R. Rajagopalachari considered the offer Jinnah had made to the Mahasabha. The meeting also discussed the talks that the Muslim League President had held respectively with Sikh political leaders and Rajagopalachari and perused various formulae for reconciling the League's Pakistan demand with *Akhand Hindusthan*. Several participants reported that the meeting considered a "concession to

⁶³ Ganpat Rai to Mookerjee, SPM Papers, II-IV Installment, File 57; *Mahratta*, 4 December 1942; A.I. Singh, 98.

Pakistan.” Mookerjee, for his part, said “[S]everal alternative schemes were discussed in relation to our talks with Mr. Jinnah.”⁶⁴

There are many obstacles to disentangling fact from rumour and conjecture as regards the substance of the Standing Committee meeting and the discussions on an inter-communal settlement that preceded it. The various terms and proposals were supposed to be kept secret. It was in Hindu Mahasabha-hardliners’ interest to exaggerate any concession or potential concession to the League. There were multiple discussions, involving different people, over the course of several months, and multiple formulae under consideration. The nature of Liaqat Ali Khan’s mandate remains obscure, the evidence suggests that after debating Jinnah’s reputed terms he and fellow UP *taluqdar* Dayal Maheshwar made additional proposals of their own. Finally, even if one makes the naive assumption that all the parties were genuinely seeking agreement—not simply using the talks to smoke out their opponents’ positions and amass bargaining points for cashing at a future British-brokered constitutional conference—the studied ambiguity of the League’s Pakistan Demand made it all but inevitable that the interlocutors would be speaking at cross-purposes.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ S.P. Mookerjee to Lakshmi Kamta Sen, 21 January 1943. SPM Papers, II-IV Installments, File 57.

⁶⁵ In two major monographs and numerous articles, Ayesha Jalal has convincingly argued that the contradictory interests of the Muslim elite in the Muslim-majority and Muslim-minority provinces constrained Jinnah from giving a precise territorial definition to Pakistan or its relationship with a federal India. While this ambiguity served Jinnah’s purpose in maintaining the unity of the League and rallying Muslims to its banner, it prevented the League from clarifying its own aims and ultimately gave the League’s political opponents great leverage in lending the Pakistan Demand constitutional form.

The confusion and ambivalence within the League’s leadership over the Pakistan demand is well-illustrated by the memoirs of Choudhury Khaliquzzaman, for many years the secretary of the UP League. The seconder of the League’s 1940 Lahore resolution, Khaliquzzaman claims he never agreed with Jinnah’s two-nations thesis for he feared its logic would lead to the communal partition of the Punjab and Bengal and the disruption of India’s “common culture” and “common social life”! See Khaliquzzaman, *Pathway to Pakistan*, 236, 320-21 and 400.

For Jalal’s argument see, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: CUP: 1984) and *Self and Sovereignty, Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850* (London: Routledge, 2000.)

That said, a careful reading of the historical record reveals that the communal partition of the Indian provinces of Punjab and Bengal was front and center in the discussions and that Mahasabha Working President S.P. Mookerjee emerged as the chief advocate of partition. Mind you partition within some over-arching Indian federation.

Responding to charges levelled by Hindu Mahasabhite hardliners that Sikh leaders were conniving with the League to partition the Punjab, Tara Singh said that it was Mookerjee who had discussed partition with Jinnah “without my knowledge or that of any other Sikh leader.” Subsequently, Mookerjee had “strongly” recommended a Punjab partition scheme to the Sikh leadership.⁶⁶ Congress dissident K.M. Munshi reports that in the fall of 1942 he and Mookerjee “evolved” a scheme for Muslim and Hindu units of a Greater India based on the communal partition of the Punjab and Bengal. During this period Munshi publicly advocated not just partition, but state support for a communal exchange of populations. “Akhand Hindusthan,” declared Munshi, “will be all the more powerful by dividing a heterogeneous province into two homogeneous ones.”⁶⁷ If partition was a “concession” to Pakistan, it was a double-edged sword. Were the Punjab and Bengal shorn respectively of their eastern and western tracts their economic

⁶⁶ *Mahratta*, 4 December 1942.

Master Tara Singh’s statement was accurate, but far from the whole truth. When Singh and other Sikh communal leaders had met with Cripps in March 1942, they had urged that the borders of north-west India be re-drawn, so as to create what they subsequently called *Azad Punjab*—that is a Punjab “free” of “Muslim domination.” (*TOP*, 1: 496, 565 and 582- 88) In their November 1942 negotiations with Jinnah, the Akali Dal leaders continued to press this demand. Under the Akali Dal scheme, the NWFP was to be merged with the western-most tracts of the Punjab. *Azad Punjab* was to be comprised of the remainder of the Punjab (including the Muslim-majority districts of Lahore, Montgomery and Multan) and, possibly, some western UP districts that were predominately populated by Jats. Both *Azad Punjab* and the new overwhelmingly Muslim-majority province on South Asia’s western extremity were to be integral parts of a federal Indian state.

In promoting their scheme, the Akali Dal stressed that no religious community would constitute a majority in *Azad Punjab*. By virtue of their wealth, strong position in the army, and keen communal-political self-consciousness, the Sikh elite would thus have been assured a leading if not dominant role in the province’s affairs. See Indu Banga, “The Crisis of Sikh Politics (1940-47),” Joseph T. O’Connell et al., ed, *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1990: 233-55.)

⁶⁷ K.M. Munshi, *Indian Constitutional Documents*, V. 1, 84 and 435; *Mahratta*, 11 December 1942.

and political importance would be vastly diminished, even if provision was made for some type of association of Muslim-majority provinces. Moreover, any reduction in the geo-political significance, population, and population mix of a prospective Muslim federation could not but impact on its relationship to a future Indian federation and the interlinked issue of Muslim representation in India's central government.

UP Muslim League leader Chaudhry Khaliqzaman, on learning from Dayal Maheshwar that Liaqat Ali Khan had agreed to lopping Ambala Division from the Punjab and that the fate of Jullunder Division was all that stood in the way of a Mahasabha-League agreement, accused the Mahasabhites of wanting to wreck Pakistan and exclude Muslims from India's government. "We want partition of administration within India; you on the other hand propose partition of the geography of India."⁶⁸

Tara Singh insisted that even in the likely event that the Muslim League rejected the Sikh's full *Azad* Punjab claim, partition was worth pursuing because it was the only "method of delivering" the majority of Punjabi "Sikhs and the Hindus from the present servile position" and would "cripple" the League's campaign for Pakistan.⁶⁹

In seconding the *Akhand Hindusthan* resolution at the Mahasabha's December 1942 Cawnpore session, J.K. Birla, pointed to the ambiguity in the League's stance. One of Mookerjee's chief patrons, Birla proclaimed his support for Muslims forming Pakistan so long as the Punjab and Bengal were partitioned and the Muslim state was contained and constrained within an Indian one.

⁶⁸ Choudhry Khaliqzaman, *Pathway to Pakistan*, 286.

Khaliqzaman immediately fired off a letter of protest to Jinnah, outlining his position that the Muslim League should stake its claim on the existing provincial units. The letter is reproduced in *Pathway*, 424-27.
⁶⁹ *Mahratta*, 4 December 1942 and 5 February 1943; Indu Banga, "The Crisis of Sikh Politics (1940-47)": 243.

Let the Muhammadans have Pakistan in those portions of the Punjab and Bengal where they are in majority, but at the same time let the Hindus, including the Sikhs, form their own government in those parts of the provinces where they have the majority. If this arrangement is agreeable to the Muslims, then the Hindus can have no objection. But if by Pakistan they mean that the Muslim-majority provinces shall have the power to secede from the Central government ... then ... it shall never be acceptable to us.⁷⁰

The insinuations of the Mahasabha hardliners notwithstanding, there is no evidence that Mookerjee lent support to any proposal that would have seen the creation of a Pakistan outside some over-arching pan-Indian state. In his diary, which was not written for publication, Mookerjee expresses his shock and outrage over Gandhi's endorsement of the "Rajagopalachari Formula" for communal settlement. First made public in 1944, this scheme called for a joint Congress-Muslim League movement for independence and the creation of a sovereign state of Pakistan out of contiguous Muslim-majority districts in the north-west and north-east, with provision for border districts to opt out. "Hitherto," complained Mookerjee, "no one was prepared to look at the idea of India's partition in any form or shape."⁷¹

Mookerjee's call for the communal partition of Bengal was the crystallization of an idea long-germinating among the *bhadralok*. As we saw in an earlier chapter, the Bengal Provincial Hindu Sabha won widespread support for its call for separately administered and financed Hindu and Muslim school systems. Anticipating such a campaign, Radha Kumud Mookerjee had called in his presidential address at the 1936 Bengal Hindu Sabha Conference for separate administration and separate purses for Bengal's Hindus and Muslims: "Let the Hindus and Moslems frankly organize

⁷⁰ *IAR*, II, 1942: 280; *Extract of the Speech (English Rendering) Delivered by Seth Jugalkishoreji Birla at the Cawnpore Session of the Hindu Mahasbha on 30th December, 1942*. Delhi: Imperial Fine Art Press, c. 1943.

⁷¹ S.P. Mookerjee, *Diary*, 94-95.

themselves as separate nationalities from top to bottom, each fostering its own national culture by its own resources, and then let them unite in an All-Bengal federal Assembly.”⁷²

But if Mookerjee’s stand had been presaged by earlier Mahasabha positions, it was the Cripps Mission of March-April 1942 that placed the question of communal partition of the principal Muslim-majority provinces on the order paper. A key tenet of Cripps’ offer was the right for dissenting provinces to opt out of an emergent Dominion of India—the first time a British policy statement had provided for the division of British India. Adding to the anxiety among Bengali Hindus and Punjabi Hindus and Sikhs was that the INC high command, while reiterating its commitment to a united India, had indicated tacit acceptance of a provincial right to self-determination. In challenging Savarkar’s order to “leave the League alone,” Maheshwar Dayal pointed to the danger represented by the Cripps Offer: “It is no use merely saying that any settlement arrived at between the Congress and the League will not bind the Hindus. ... [H]ad the Congress and the League accepted the Cripps proposals, those would have been enforced and the right of self-determination to the Muslims and the right to the provinces to secede would have been given inspite of our protests.”⁷³ If accession to a future Indian federation was to be decided by provincial plebiscites, clearly the best means to defuse the Muslim majority’s power to determine the future status of Bengal and the Punjab and to undercut Pakistan’s potential ambit and strength would be for the minorities to secure provincial status for the enclaves in which they dominated—or so ran the argument of Mookerjee, Maheshwar Dayal and a growing faction of the Hindu and Sikh political elite.

⁷² *IAR*, II, 1936: 265.

⁷³ Maheshwar Dayal to Savarkar, 23 November 1942, SPM Papers, II-IV Installment, File 57.

Needless to say, this does not explain Jinnah's stance in the inter-communal negotiations of the fall of 1942. That is a task for historians of the League and Jinnah's biographers. However, we should note that Jinnah's response to the Cripps proposals in some ways paralleled that of Hindu and Sikh communal spokesmen. The Muslim League President deplored Cripps' privileging of the existing provinces as the mechanism through which the popular will in favor of accession to a future Indian federation should be determined. Jinnah demanded an exclusively Muslim plebiscite on Pakistan, otherwise "the Muslims in Bengal and the Punjab will be at the mercy of the Hindu minority in those provinces, who will exert themselves to the fullest extent and length for keeping the Musalmans tied to the chariot wheel of Hindudom."

* * *

Savarkar had from the outset opposed negotiations with Jinnah, and—except for the occasion of the October Mahasabha Working Committee meeting where he supported them as a ruse—continued to oppose them. This had nothing to do with the specifics of the negotiations. Savarkar was ideologically opposed to anything that smacked of a concession to Muslim communalism, but from the standpoint of Hindu nationalism, not fidelity to democratic principles. Thus Savarkar saw no incongruity in his chastizing his Muslim communal political opponents for demanding weightage and separate electorates and his arguing that Kashmir was right to resist the demand for responsible government for that would imperil the princely state's Hindu character.

Stoking Savarkar's opposition to the Special Committee's contacts with Jinnah and the Muslim League were his fears that the Mahasabha was being pulled into the orbit of the Congress. "[T]he real danger to the integrity of India," Savarkar told the

Mahasabha's Cawnpore session, "rises now more eminently from the Pakistani Hindus than from the efforts of the Pakistani Moslems."⁷⁴

Savarkar continued to bank on an Anglo-Hindu alliance. He who had termed the Bihar government's ban on the Mahasabha holding its annual session at Bhagalpur an affront to Hindu honor, now said that the Mahasabha should move its December 1942 session from Cawnpore if that was what the authorities wanted. The same month Mookerjee resigned as Bengal's Finance Minister to protest Britain's refusal to part with power, "a reign of repression" against "every form of nationalist activities" and the usurpation of ministerial authority by the Bengal Governor and bureaucracy, Savarkar cautioned Maheshwar Dayal not to give offense to the British authorities since the government has been "courteously behaving to us" and dismissed "independence as a far off cry."⁷⁵

* * *

According to Munshi, it was the voice of the absent Savarkar that prevailed at the meeting that the Standing Committee of the Non-Party Conference convened to consider an inter-communal settlement.⁷⁶ Munshi, however, wrote his account many years later. When the meeting broke up, the participants said it had been inconclusive. Moonje left early, but not before reading out a statement rejecting Jinnah's terms and any partition scheme.⁷⁷ Tara Singh deplored the disunity among Hindu political leaders and chided them for failing to agree to a "readjustment of the boundaries of the Punjab." "[I]n their anxiety to be Nationalists," many Hindu politicians "cease to take a realistic view of the

⁷⁴ *Savarkar Writings*, 485.

⁷⁵ Savarkar to Maheshwar Dayal, 18 November 1942, SPM Papers II-IV Installment, File 57; Mookerjee to Bengal Governor Sir John Herbert, 16 November 1942 and "Why I Resigned" Mookerjee's 12 February 1943 statement to the Bengal Legislature, as reproduced in Mookerjee, *Diary*, 198-212.

⁷⁶ Munshi, *Indian Constitutional Documents*, V. 1, 85.

⁷⁷ Moonje to M.R. Jayakar, 24 December 1942, Jayakar Papers, File 709, Microfilm Roll 123, U of T.

situation.” Rajagopalachari voiced confidence that “something” would “come out of this conference within two months ...”⁷⁸

The effort to bring about an Hindu Mahasabha-Muslim League alliance was foundering, but Viceroy Linlithgow was anxious for it to be good and buried. Three days after the meeting of the Standing Committee concluded, the Viceroy intervened in the debate over Pakistan, delivering a speech that was widely perceived as a boost for Savarkar. In his December 17 address to the Associated Chambers of Commerce of Calcutta, Linlithgow emphasized the importance of the subcontinent’s geographic unity for India’s future development. According to a contemporary account, “The [Hindu communal] extremists ... were jubilant ...”⁷⁹ Reporting on reaction to the Viceroy’s speech, the Governor of the Central Provinces wrote, “My Central Intelligence Officer records that only the more uncompromising Hindu elements were pleased, that the Muslims were displeased and that moderate Hindu opinion feels that the hands of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha leaders who were working for communal settlement have been weakened.”⁸⁰

The message received was the one Linlithgow intended. Apprising the Secretary of State of his plans, Linlithgow said his Calcutta speech would “encourage the Mahasabha, & co. though I trust in terms sufficiently guarded so far as the Muslims are concerned to avoid giving Jinnah a legitimate grievance.”⁸¹

The Viceroy’s own words demonstrate he was intent on bolstering Savarkar’s leadership, so as to ensure India’s non-Congress political elite did not coalesce around a

⁷⁸ *IAR*, II, 1942: 64.

⁷⁹ *India Yearbook* (1943-44): 840.

⁸⁰ *TOP*, 3, 448-9.

⁸¹ Linlithgow to S.S. of India, 15 December 1942, *TOP*, 3, 387.

common platform. Linlithgow also wanted to take Jinnah down a peg or two. The British resented the Muslim League's failure to join the government, especially when faced with the Quit India agitation, and were wary of Jinnah's attempts to build up the League in the Punjab, where the pro-war, inter-communal Unionist Party held office.⁸²

The Viceroy's speech exemplifies the hypocrisy of the colonial regime and its role in fanning communal discord. While providing encouragement to the most ardent Hindu chauvinists, Linlithgow repeated the *Raj*'s by now almost ritual admonitions of India's political elite for failing to work together.⁸³ Linlithgow's intervention also underscores just how close were the relations between the *Raj* and the principal ideologue of *Hindutva*. By the time of Linlithgow's speech, Savarkar had won re-election, but there was little doubt he had been forced onto the defensive in the preceding months. According to Maheshwar Dayal, Linlithgow's Counsellor Sir J.P. Srivastava pleaded with Savarkar to rescind his retirement.⁸⁴ It is quite possible Linlithgow encouraged Srivastava in this. The Viceroy took considerable pride in his Mahasabha gambit and even professed, in the patronizing manner of a British aristocrat, a fondness for the one-time Andamans detainee Savarkar.⁸⁵

Scholars have generally ignored the fall 1942 discussions of a communal settlement. Nonetheless, these discussions marked a turning point. Key elements in the Hindu and Sikh elite fastened onto the communal partition of Bengal and Punjab as pivotal to their response to the Pakistan demand. This notion was subsequently incorporated by Rajagopalachari in his formula—arguably, the first blueprint for what

⁸² A.I. Singh, 99-100.

⁸³ The text of Linlithgow's speech can be found in Linlithgow, *Speeches and Statements* (New Delhi, 1945) 338-52.

⁸⁴ Maheshwar Dayal to Savarkar, 14 January 1943, S.P. Mookerjee Papers II-IV Installment, File 57.

⁸⁵ Linlithgow to Secretary of State, 17 September 1940, IOL L/P&J/8/507.

occurred in 1947—although Rajagopalachari went considerably further, conceding that Pakistan would be a sovereign state and would have at most a confederal tie to India.⁸⁶

In 1947, S.P. Mookerjee and Master Tara Singh emerged as the principal leaders of the campaigns to partition their respective provinces. Moreover, the lines of division that appeared in the Mahasabha in 1942 over partition were largely reproduced. Many Mahasabhites, particularly in Maharashtra, opposed the 1947 Mookerjee-spearheaded campaign to partition Bengal into a Hindu East and a Muslim West Bengal.

IV: The Mahasabha's Cawnpore Session and the alleged plot to "waylay" the Mahasabha

In the months preceding the Mahasabha's 1942 Cawnpore session, Savarkar and Mookerjee pulled in different directions. Mookerjee searched for an effective rallying point between the INC's challenge to the constitutional order and Savarkar's support for the colonial regime. But it proved a vain search. Then the Viceroy pulled the rug from under his attempt to forge an alliance with the League. Why press for a controversial change in strategy, if the British themselves were turning against the Pakistan scheme? During the fall of 1942, Savarkar became ever more agitated over the Mahasabha's burgeoning contacts with the Congress and the Muslim League. Although he had instructed the Mahasabha General Secretary that he would not seek a sixth term, he

⁸⁶ When the Rajagopalachari formula became public in the summer of 1944, Maheshwar Dayal accused the once and future Congressman of having reproduced almost verbatim the terms Jinnah had offered the Mahasabha in the fall of 1942. There are in fact significant differences. But Jinnah's purported 1942 terms and the surrounding partition discussion clearly did influence Rajagopalachari's thinking. In a 1966 letter to Munshi, Rajagopalachari made a back-handed admission of this: "The proposals I gave to Gandhiji were then and there written by me for him because he wanted it in writing so that he could understand them clearly. It might be the same or nearly the same as any other paper." See Munshi, *Indian Constitutional Documents*, V. I, 84.

changed his mind, and for the first time overtly campaigned to secure the Mahasabha leadership.⁸⁷

Mookerjee responded by renouncing any ambition to the Mahasabha Presidency. If the outgoing president “were willing to stand again there was no question” of his wanting the post.⁸⁸ When everything was said and done, Mookerjee remained wholly committed to using the Mahasabha, including its militant Hindu nationalist wing, to pressure the Congress to better safeguard “Hindu rights,” which in his mind were largely synonymous with the privileged position of the Bengali *bhadralok*. He would neither quit the Mahasabha, nor challenge Savarkar for its presidency.

In the end, Savarkar’s re-election was a virtual coronation, with 19 of the 23 provincial Hindu Sabhas making him their final choice. The *Mahratta*, was jubilant. “[B]arring a handful of elders,” exulted a *Mahratta* editorial, “the rank and file is unaffected by the lure of communal compromises ...” Moreover, Savarkar had proven his political mettle and wisdom in the preceding months by steering the Mahasabha clear of a second no less dangerous pitfall: he had prevented the Mahasabha from becoming involved in the “haphazard turmoil” of the Quit India agitation. For this, conceded the *Mahratta*, Savarkar had been “most harshly” criticized by many Mahasabhites. “It was said that the erstwhile revolutionary had become indirectly a staunch support of perpetual foreign domination.” But Savarkar’s overwhelming re-election indicated Mahsabhites had learned to appreciate his “capacity to see through the mists of temporary popular

⁸⁷ *Savarkar Writings*, 502.

⁸⁸ Maheshwar Dayal to Savarkar, 14 January 1943, SPM Papers, II-IV Installment, File 57.

upheavals.” As for those “who want to ride the crest of popular favor” with “political stunts,” they had “no legitimate place in the Hindu Mahasabha.”⁸⁹

At the Mahaassbha’s Cawnpore session, held during Christmas week 1942, Savarkar and Mookerjee gave a convincing display of unity. In his Presidential address, Savarkar repeatedly praised the Bengali Mahasabhite.⁹⁰ The session unanimously approved a resolution that congratulated Mookerjee for demonstrating the true spirit of responsive-cooperation by renouncing his Ministry in the Bengal government. But on the substantive issues, Savarkar prevailed.⁹¹

Savarkar’s presidential address was unflinching in its criticism of Gandhi, the Congress, and the Quit India agitation. Savarkar thanked the Viceroy for his recent “fervent appeal” for Indian unity, called for a hundred-fold intensification of the Hindu militarization movement, and in the name of “occupying centers of political power” argued for the Mahasabha to increase its participation in the institutions of the *Raj*. Savarkar was no less emphatic in his rejection of negotiations with the Muslim League. He implored the Mahasbaha faithful not to “get stampeded by the pseudo-nationalistic forces into any unbecoming pacts,” and to instead expend their energies on preparing for civil war. As it is “very probable” that the Hindu Mahasabhites “will be called upon to fight out” a Muslim attempt “to thrust Pakistan on us,” they should “reserve whatever strength” they command for that impending struggle. “Do not fritter away your energies” in an “untimely and tactless movement” that “loses more than [it] gains.”⁹²

⁸⁹ *Mahratta*, 11 December 1942.

⁹⁰ *Savarkar Writings*, 463, 477 and 480.

⁹¹ *IAR*, II, 1942: 280-81.

⁹² *Savarkar Writings*, 467-470, 473-74, 491, 495-98, and 501.

Savarkar justified his retaining the Mahasabha presidency for an unprecedented sixth straight year out of the need to thwart a Congress conspiracy to capture the Mahasabha. Some Congress supporters, claimed Savarkar, were trying to “browbeat” the Mahasabha into submission, others wanted to “kill it with kindness.” But whatever their stratagem, all of them wanted the Mahasabha to betray Hindu ideology and the Hindu nation. These “worshippers” of the Indian “pseudo nationality” would not just do nothing to assist the Mahasabhites in opposing Pakistan; they “would actually try to combat you and try to put you in a false position by their willing surrender to the Muslim demands ...”⁹³

The charges of a Congress plot to seize control of the Mahasabha were not something Savarkar made just in the heat of the moment. Seven months later he amplified them:

it came to my notice that some of the leading Congressites who were outside the jail had actually conspired to capture the Hindu Mahasabha itself because it refused to serve the Congress as a handmaid. They wanted to use it to take the Congress-nuts out of the fire and make the Mahasabha accept the Pakistan at least in principle. ... In order to ward off this danger in time and to expose and frustrate this conspiracy I resolved ... [to] contest the [Mahasabha] election.⁹⁴

Savarkar’s supporters echoed his claim that pro-Congress elements sought to use the Mahasabha to reach an understanding with the League. In urging Mookerjee not to allow his name to go forward against Savarkar’s in the contest for the Mahasabha presidency, Ganpat Rai charged that “there is a move amongst the Hindus of the Non-Hindu Mahasabha circles to coerce the Hindu Mahasabha leaders to submit to Mr.

⁹³ *Savarkar Writings*, 462 and 495-96.

⁹⁴ Savarkar, *Hindu Rashtra*, 230.

Jinnah's demand of Pakistan."⁹⁵ In an editorial lauding the outcome of the Cawnpore session, the *Mahratta* welcomed the lifting of the "cloud of suspicion and uncertainty" that had hung over the Mahasabha "for months." Mahasabhites' misgivings about the work of the Special Committee had been justified for there was "an array of evidence" to show that "powerful elements in the country" hitherto associated with the INC had "suddenly developed an interest in the affairs of the Mahasabha" with the aim of using it "to save the situation for Congress."⁹⁶

No doubt there was an element of wilful exaggeration and calculation in Savarkar's claims of a Congress takeover plot. The impact that the Congress-initiated Quit India agitation had had on the Mahasabha riled Savarkar. Nevertheless, as we have seen in our discussion of the Mahasabha's "National Demand campaign," it is incontrovertible that pro-Congress elements sought to use the Mahasabha to pressure the *Raj*. Likewise it is indubitable that elements in and around the Congress and "moderates" such as Sapru hoped to use the Mahasabha to reach a deal with the League and thus revive the pressure for home rule. This was partly a consequence of pragmatics—the search by Congress supporters for some means to extricate their organization from its poise of all-out confrontation with the *Raj*—and partly a result of the Congress and Mahasabha drawing support from, and serving as political instruments for, one and the same Hindu economic and political elite. Leading capitalists patronized both organizations. Maheshwar Dayal, the Raja of Kotra and Mahasabha General Secretary till his falling out with Savarkar, was representative of a layer *taluqdars* and

⁹⁵ Ganpat Rai to Mookerjee, 27 November 1942, SPM Papers, II-IV Installment, File 57.

⁹⁶ *Mahratta*, 8 January 1943.

other large landowners who were reconsidering the wisdom of pursuing a policy of outright opposition to the Congress.

Most of the funding for the Mahasabha's Cawnpore session (more than 50,000 rupees) came from the Singhanias, today, as then, one of India's wealthiest business families.⁹⁷ British intelligence believed that Sir Padampat Singhanian helped bankroll the Quit India agitation and even encouraged the Congress underground to set fire to the mill of a commercial rival.⁹⁸ In his address to the Mahasabha's Cawnpore session, Lakshminipat Singhanian, Sir Padampat's brother and the chairman of the Reception Committee, endorsed Savarkar's militarization policy, while urging the Mahasabha not to denounce the Congress for its stand on Hindu-Muslim unity.⁹⁹ None of this points to either Singhanian being party to a Congress conspiracy to seize control of the Mahasabha. What it does show is that with the Congress placed by the *Raj* in a deep freeze for the remainder of the war, business gravitated to the Mahasabha to serve as its political vehicle. Those capitalists who had been conspicuous in their backing of the Quit India agitation might also have wanted to use support for the pro-war and pro-government Mahasabha to signal the *Raj* that their wayward days were over.

A long-time member of the Congress high command, Rajagopalachari was a different species. From the summer of 1940, when he first raised the call for a "national government," all Rajagopalachari's efforts were directed at reconciling the Congress and the *Raj* for the duration of the war.¹⁰⁰ Although he had once been a leading proponent of

⁹⁷ Maheshwar Dayal to Savarkar, 23 November 1942, SPM Papers, II-IV Installment, File 57.

⁹⁸ P.N. Chopra, ed., *Quit India Movement, Vol. II: Role of Big Business—British Secret Documents* (New Delhi: Interprint) 59.

⁹⁹ *IAR*, II, 1942: 259.

¹⁰⁰ A.R.H. Copley, *The Political Career of C. Rajagopalachari 1937-1954: A Moralism in Politics* (Delhi: MacMillan of India, 1978) 211

Gandhi's non-cooperation strategy, Rajagopalachari now feared the socially destabilizing consequences of the INC's drive for independence. Having broken with the Congress, Rajagopalachari found himself without a following. But this did not mean he was without influence. Rajagopalachari was intimate with G.D. Birla, who shared his view that in the interests of securing a quick settlement with the British the Congress should be ready to consider partition.¹⁰¹ Although Rajagopalachari was estranged from the Congress many believed that he continued to have Gandhi's confidence, both because of their decades' long political association and because Gandhi's youngest son was married to Rajagopalachari's daughter. Events would ultimately show this perception was correct.¹⁰²

Rajagopalachari clearly did have hopes he would find support within the Mahasabha for his policy of pressing for an alliance with the League. He was thus taken aback by the extent of the triumph of Savarkar's "rejectionist" wing: "[E]ven those few leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha who more or less sympathized with my formula for Hindu-Muslim Unity fell a prey to crowd psychology at [the Mahasabha's] Cawnpore" session.¹⁰³ Congress ally Allah Bux said he had followed the proceedings at Cawnpore "with feelings of amazement and despair."¹⁰⁴

The terms "plot" and "conspiracy" should probably be shunned as they bespeak Savarkar's hostility to the Congress and his megalomania. Nonetheless, he was not wrong in believing that elements in and around the Congress were trying to enlist the

¹⁰¹ Suniti Kumar Ghosh, *India and the Raj 1919-1947*, Vol. 2, (Bombay: Research Unit for Political Economy) 241.

¹⁰² In February 1943, Gandhi endorsed Rajapolachari's formula for the creation of a sovereign Pakistan and the communal partition of Bengal and Punjab, although neither the formula nor Gandhi's support were then made public; at Gandhi's prompting, the Congress High Command reintegrated Rajapolachari into its ranks after the war, although his political resurrection was bitterly opposed by the Congress leadership in south India. (Copley, 220-230.)

¹⁰³ As cited in *Savarkar Writings*, 503.

¹⁰⁴ *Mahratta*, 8 January 1943.

Mahasabha as an ally and use it as an instrument for doing business with the *Raj* and the Muslim League. Moreover, undoubtedly such elements did come to recognize that Savarkar was an obstacle to their aims. In Bengal, as we have previously shown, the Mahasabha already often worked in concert with both the Bose and official wings of the Congress. When Mookerjee inherited the Masasbaha presidency, the Mahasabha and the Congress would form a *de facto* alliance. Talks on a formal electoral bloc for the 1945-46 elections collapsed only when it came to allotting seats. That the Congress was ready to fish in such polluted—nay poisoned—waters tells us much about the strength of its opposition to communalism.

The Mahasabha's alliance with the colonial authorities had been shaken by the momentous events of 1942, but Savarkar had kept the Mahasabha bound to the *Raj*. The Quit India agitation however had forced Savarkar to even more explicitly indicate his opposition to any challenge to British rule and in so doing undermined support for his leadership. With the Congress suppressed, the Mahasabha became a focus of the attention of India's political elite. But the more external pressure came to bear on the Mahasabha, the sharper became its internal divisions over its attitude to the *Raj*, the Congress and the Muslim League.

V. Savarkar, the Mahasabha and Gandhi's 1943 Fast

At Cawnpore, the Mahasabha not only reaffirmed Savarkar's policy and leadership. It further strengthened his position by accepting a suggestion from the *Mahratta* that the Mahasabha copy the Congress and delegate to its president the power to choose the members of the Mahasabha Working Committee.¹⁰⁵ Savarkar promptly

¹⁰⁵ *Mahratta*, 11 December 1942 and 8 January 1943.

made use of this prerogative to stack the Working Committee with “a clear majority of his blind followers,” most of them fellow Maharashtrians.¹⁰⁶ The Mahasabha President’s triumph proved short-lived, however. To the chagrin of the British regime and its most loyal supporters like Savarkar, Gandhi found a means to use his moral authority and immense popularity to thrust the Congress back onto center-stage. His three-week, 1943 fast once again forced political India, the Mahasabha included, to divide into pro- and anti-Congress camps. But in February-March 1943, even those sections of the Hindu political and economic elite that had tilted toward the government in August 1942 out of fear that non-cooperation would stimulate subaltern unrest and facilitate a Japanese invasion were fearful that the Indian politician best able to contain and manipulate popular discontent might die. A second concern was that the British, having quelled the Congress challenge, remained as unresponsive as ever to calls for increased power-sharing. Savarkar’s ambivalent stand on Gandhi’s fast and his March 1943 pronouncement against Gandhi’s release from detention caused widespread dissension within the Mahasabha and alienated the “moderates” of the Non-Party Leaders’ Conference.

With customary shrewdness, Gandhi framed his 1943 fast as a question of personal honor. Eschewing overt political aims, Gandhi claimed his fast was occasioned by British suggestions that he had acted in bad faith and counselled violence. Unless the British retracted or proved to his satisfaction their claims that in August 1942 the Congress had rejected negotiation for rebellion and resorted to violence unprovoked, he would be compelled to fast for three weeks. Gandhi denied his fast was aimed at winning

¹⁰⁶ Dayal Seth to Mehr Chand Khanna, 31 May 1943, SPM Papers, II-IV Installment, File 57.

his liberty; yet he also said that were he freed unconditionally he would break his fast, because he had not “conceived [it] to be taken as a free man.”¹⁰⁷

Gandhi's fast had its intended impact. It galvanized a despondent Congress and sent politicized India into a flurry of activity. On the third day of the fast, S.P. Mookerjee tabled a special motion in the Bengal Legislative Assembly urging the Bengal government to press for Gandhi's immediate and unconditional release. It won easy passage. Meeting on February 14, the fifth day of the fast, the Mahasabha Working Committee urged the government to “set aside all political considerations and release” Gandhi so as “to save his precious life.” On the 17th, three members of the Viceroy's Council, M.S. Aney, N.R. Sarkar and Sir H.P. Mody, resigned in protest against the government's refusal to free Gandhi. In large parts of the country, there were *hartals*, demonstrations and strikes.¹⁰⁸ Prominent Mahasabhites, including Mookerjee, Moonje, N.C. Chatterjee, and Raja Maheshwar Dayal, attended a conference in Delhi on the 19th and 20th that brought together a cross-section of Indian political, religious, and business leaders, from the Communist B.T. Randive to the “moderate” Jadgish Prasad, to demand Gandhi's immediate and unconditional release. The conference resolution also relayed the message that Gandhi had given to those political and business leaders who had been allowed to visit him during his fast: he was ready to resume bargaining with the *Raj*.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ *TOP*, 31, 642. The British held this to be prove of Gandhi's hypocrisy and duplicity. Gandhi gave no further explanation of his position. Presumably he would have argued that his release would have rendered his fast unnecessary because it would have constituted proof he had been restored to the government's confidence.

¹⁰⁸ Bipin Chandra et al, *India's Struggle for Independence* (New Delhi: Penguib, 1988) 464. The British, however, took comfort in the fact that the scope and intensity of the protests was a far cry from that of the Quit India agitation.

¹⁰⁹ *Mahratta*, 19 February 1943; *TOP*, 3: 697-98, 705-06 and 712. Stated the resolution: “The recent talks which some of us have had with Gandhiji lead us to believe that a move for reconciliation at the present juncture will bear fruit.”

Savarkar was far from pleased with this turn of events. In a matter of days, Gandhi's fast had revived the Congress, refocused public attention on the Mahasabha's alliance with the British, and badly divided his organization. The resolution that the Mahasabha Working Committee had adopted at its meeting of the 14th had been yet another attempt to paper over differences within the Mahasabha leadership over its attitude to the Gandhi-led Congress. The resolution's call for Gandhi's release was "balanced" by its condemnation of fasting as a political weapon and its warning that the Hindu Mahasabha would vigorously oppose any attempt on the part of the Congress to negotiate with the Muslim League.

But the national crisis provoked by Gandhi's fast soon shattered the Mahsabaha's pretense of unity. Even as the Working Committee was deliberating, Sir J.P. Srivastava, the Mahasabhite on the Viceroy's Council, was being prevailed upon by key members of India's elite to renounce his post as Civil Defence Minister. On the 11th, Linlithgow had reported to Amery that G.D. Birla and the Bombay magnate Purshottamdas Thakurdas, among others, were placing intense pressure on the UP industrialist and Mahasabhite: "Srivastava is still standing firm but made it clear that if he was left as the only Hindu in Council his position would be almost impossible."¹¹⁰

Adding to the indignation against Srivastava, even among "moderates," was a rumor that when the issue had been debated by the Viceroy's Council on February 9, he had voted to keep Gandhi in detention even should the fast place the Congress leader's life in jeopardy.¹¹¹ Wrote the Viceroy on 15 February, Srivastava "is being pilloried as

¹¹⁰ *TOP*, 3: 651.

¹¹¹ Previous to this vote, the Government of India had offered Gandhi a temporary release from detention for the duration of his fast, because it feared the political impact of his dying while in custody. Gandhi declined the offer.

having given what is alleged to have been the deciding vote ...”¹¹² Council deliberations were subject to an oath of secrecy, but the rumor was well-founded.¹¹³ Srivastava had voted for Gandhi to remain, if need be, in detention till death. Or, as Linlithgow liked to put it, for “letting the Mahatma starve himself to death if he wants to.”¹¹⁴ Moreover, Srivastava’s vote had been of considerable political import, even if the claim that it had been decisive in determining whether Gandhi would be freed or not when “the danger point” was reached was erroneous. Had Srivastava voted in favor of freeing Gandhi, the Council would have deadlocked 6 to 6, instead of voting 7 to 5 against his release.¹¹⁵ In the event of a deadlock, the Viceroy would have had to exercise his power of veto, an action that would have underscored the autocratic character of the British *Raj* and the isolation of India’s colonial overlords.¹¹⁶

Srivastava’s vote to deny Gandhi his liberty was a travesty of the purported policy of the Mahasabha—mind you, the presence of a Mahasabhite in the Viceroy’s Council, even as the *Raj* was savagely suppressing the Congress, had long stretched the credulity of the Mahasabha’s claim to be “neutral” in the clash between the British and

¹¹² TOP, 3: 683.

¹¹³ Aney, Sarkar and Mody were not permitted to even make mention of Gandhi and his fast in their public explanation of their resignations. Nonetheless, no one doubted the true cause. See TOP, 3: 683.

¹¹⁴ TOP, 3: 638.

¹¹⁵ TOP, 3: 643.

¹¹⁶ Srivastava was an inveterate opponent of the Congress. But such was the antipathy toward India’s colonial regime and so widespread the sympathy for Gandhi and the Congress that Gandhi’s fast caused a rift in Srivastava’s own household. In sympathy with Gandhi, Lady Kailash Srivastava refused to join her husband at a dinner for the Viceroy. She later attended the February 19 Leaders’ Conference and, in a vain attempt to force her husband’s resignation from the Viceroy’s Council, “almost offered satyagrah at the capital.” (Towards Freedom 1943–44, 1495 E.V.S. Maniam, *Landmarks in the Life of Sir J.P. Srivastava* (Bombay: Pratt and Co, undated).

Srivastava’s daughter, who was already acting as a conduit for funds to the Congress underground, also tried to pressure her father into resigning. In so doing, she was reputedly acting on instructions from the outlaw Congress Socialist leader Aruna Asaf Ali.

The Congress didn’t forgive Srivastava for his stand against Gandhi in 1943, at least not until it was well-entrenched in power. In February 1946, Wavell observed that the “Congress has its knife into J.P. Srivastava for some reason.” See *Viceroy’s Journal*, 210. In 1952, however, Srivastava was elected to the *Rajya Sabha* as a Congressman.

the Congress. In any event, both before and after the eruption of the Quit India movement the Mahasabha had routinely passed motions acknowledging the “patriotic motives” of Congress political prisoners and urging their release.¹¹⁷ Yet Srivastava suffered no rebuke from Savarkar for flouting official Mahasabha policy and voting to keep Gandhi’s in detention. Rather the Mahasabha President and Moonje implored Srivastava to defy public opinion and not resign his Council seat.¹¹⁸

The *Mahratta* supported Savarkar’s stand. So did two recent Congress converts to the Mahasabha, the Orissan Nilakantha Das and the Madrasi Dr. P.V. Varadarajulu Naidu.¹¹⁹ Both Das and Naidu were scheming to participate in, if not lead, non-Congress, coalition ministries in their respective provinces. Srivastava’s resignation would have dealt a blow to their plans, for it would have thrown into question the Mahasabha’s alliance with the British colonial regime and its commitment to accepting office. But Das’s and Naidu’s chief concern was that if the British relented and freed Gandhi, their Congress opponents would emerge greatly strengthened.

Moonje apparently saw no contradiction between helping a Mahasabhite cling to office who, in express opposition to the organization’s own policy, had voted to hold Gandhi in detention and endorsing the various appeals issued by the Delhi Leaders’ Conference for Gandhi’s immediate and unconditional release. Savarkar, however, recognized the incongruity of his position. Under conditions where the demand for Gandhi’s release had become the cause of all political India (the Muslim League and Ambedkar’s Scheduled Caste Federation excepted), Savarkar issued a statement urging

¹¹⁷ *Hindu Outlook*, 16 November 1940; Dayal Seth, *The Mahasabha Stand Explained*, 5.

¹¹⁸ Moonje’s report on his work as Mahasabha General Secretary in 1943, HMS C-40.

¹¹⁹ *Mahratta*, 5 March 1943; Maheshwar Dayal to Nilakantha Das undated (copy to S.P. Mookerjee, 15 June 1943), SPM Papers II-IV, Installment, File 57.

that all efforts to pressure the British authorities to release Gandhi be abandoned and appeals instead made to Gandhi to forsake his fast. Since an “alien and unsympathetic” government had remained deaf to the calls for Gandhi’s release, the only way, argued Savarkar, to fulfill the nation’s wish that his life be spared was to prevail on Gandhi to break his fast. “I consequently implore all those gentlemen who have taken part in the conference at Delhi to issue an appeal to Gandhiji himself to give up his fast ...”¹²⁰

Once again a major political crisis had revealed that the Mahasabha was a house divided. While Savarkar was increasingly distancing himself from the Mahasabha Working Committee’s call for Gandhi’s release, Mookerjee and other leading Mahasabhis were front and center in the campaign to free Gandhi from British detention. The Bengal Provincial Hindu Sabha passed a resolution commending the three Councillors who had resigned and urging the Indians that remained on the Viceroy’s council to follow suit. But Mookerjee shied away from publicly criticizing Savarkar and acquiesced when the Mahasabha President refused to convene a meeting of the party’s all-India Working Committee to discuss the Srivastava affair.¹²¹ Maheshwar Dayal was not so circumspect. He specifically demanded Srivastava’s resignation—indeed, the *Mahratta* chided him for failing to call for the resignations of the other Indian Councilors—and in subsequent weeks he repeatedly accused Savarkar of having ordered Srivastava not to resign.¹²² At Maheshwar Dayal’s instigation, the Working Committee

¹²⁰ *Mahratta*, 26 February 1943.

¹²¹ Harish Chandra to S.P. Mookerjee, 4 March 1943, and Mookerjee’s undated reply; Maheshwar Dayal to Mehr Chand Khanna 31 May 1943, SPM Papers II-IV, Installment, File 57.

¹²² *Mahratta*, 5 March 1943.

of the Agra Provincial Hindu Sabha passed a resolution “disapproving of the present policy of Savarkar and especially of his statement forbidding” Srivastava’s resignation.¹²³

Savarkar’s equivocal support for the campaign to free Gandhi sent a shock wave through the Mahasabha and its periphery. According to the *Raj*’s intelligence service, the Singhanias, who had bankrolled the Mahasabha’s recent Cawnpore session, “flatly refused” a request from Dr. Moonje for further funds in March 1943 “owing to V.D. Savarkar’s attitude to Gandhi’s fast.”¹²⁴ Mehr Chand Khanna, a veteran Mahasabhaite from the NWFP, joined Maheshwar Dayal in arguing that Savarkar’s support for Srivastava had done “great harm” to both the Mahasabha and to Savarkar’s political prestige, especially since the Mahasabhaite Minister subsequently tried to escape public opprobrium by claiming that he would have resigned if not for the Mahasabha President’s advice.¹²⁵

Anant Sadashiv Bhide, a professed ardent “Savarkarite,” newly co-opted onto the Mahasabha’s Working Committee, took up the cudgels on his guru’s behalf. In a series of newspaper articles published in March 1943, Bhide lauded Srivastava for his “metal” (*sic*) and “sense of loyalty” to the Mahasabha, while castigating Savarkar’s Mahasabha critics for trying to ride “two horses.” Gandhi’s fast, he affirmed, had “exposed many in their capacity of understanding the Hindu Ideology ...”¹²⁶

Savarkar shared Bhide’s perception that his Mahasabha’s critics were ignorant of Hindu nationalist ideology. But unlike his disciple, Savarkar was careful to differentiate

¹²³ *UP Weekly Intelligence Report*, 7 May 1943.

¹²⁴ P.N. Chopra, ed, *Quit India Movement, Vol. 2: Role of Big Business—British Secret Documents* (New Delhi: Interprint, 1991) 73.

¹²⁵ Mehr Chand Khanna to Nilkanatha Das, 9 June 1943 and Maheshwar Dayal to Nilakantha Das undated (copy to S.P. Mookerjee, 15 June 1943), SPM Papers, II-IV Installment, File 57.

¹²⁶ Anant Sadashiv (Guruji) Bhide, *From Quit India to Split India*, 3, 38-39 and 41.

between Maheshwar Dayal and Mookerjee. The UP *taluqdar* was censured by the next Mahasabha Working Committee meeting.¹²⁷ To Mookerjee, Savarkar wrote to suggest they vacation together so that he could better acquaint the Bengali with the tenets of *Hindutva*.¹²⁸

* * *

During Gandhi's fast, some of Savarkar's Congress critics argued that by encouraging Srivastava to keep his Council seat, then urging Gandhi to break his fast, the Mahasabha President had in effect supported the Congress leader's continued detention. Mahasabhites responded to such charges by pointing to their February 14 Working Committee resolution. However, soon after Gandhi had successfully completed his fast, Savarkar issued a statement that left no room for doubt as to where he stood in respect to the call for Gandhi's release. The Mahasabha President's statement placed him incontrovertibly on the side of the colonial authorities in depriving the Congress leader of his liberty. Moreover, in demanding that Gandhi's release be made conditional on his renouncing the Quit India resolution and movement, Savarkar gave explicit support to the colonial regime's August 1942 outlawing of the Congress and arrest of its leadership.

Savarkar's statement came in response to a claim by organizers of a Leaders' Conference held in Bombay March 9-10 that he had supported their call for Gandhi's release as the first step in finding a solution to India's constitutional deadlock. Savarkar had attended the first day of the Bombay conference, but absented himself from the proceedings once it became clear that the participants looked to Gandhi and the Congress

¹²⁷ *IAR*, I, 1943: 268.

¹²⁸ Savarkar to S.P. Mookerjee, 2 March, 1943, SPM Papers, II-IV Installment, File 57.

to play the key role in any constitutional settlement.¹²⁹ Here things might well have stood, but the organizers issued a statement to the press that named several prominent Mahasabha members on a list of persons “said to be in agreement” although they had been unable to come to Bombay and asserted Savarkar “has signified his assent to the statement issued.”¹³⁰

The Mahasabha President’s retort was customarily acerbic. He denied having indicated his readiness to join with the likes of T.B. Sapru, M.R. Jayakar, C. Rajagopalachari, Master Tara Singh, Allah Bux, and J.R.D. Tata in appealing to the government to initiate a process of reconciliation with “nationalist India” by setting Gandhi at liberty. Then declared that he would be willing to consider giving his assent to Gandhi’s release only if the Congress leader were “prepared to call off the resolution of last August and withdraw his reference to rebellion and his adjuration to ‘do or die’ and to give suitable assurances to the future [including] ... condemnation of violence, &c. by the Congress leaders ...” Should the conference participants set aside their “apprehension” and approach him for support, wrote Savarkar. “I have no intention of sparing them. ... I shall bring out ... as forcibly as I can continued absence of any effective condemnation of violence ... by Gandhi himself.”¹³¹

¹²⁹ The Governor of Bombay reported to the Viceroy that Savarkar “read a newspaper the whole time” he was at the conference “and, when asked for his views at the end, remarked that ... the conference could achieve nothing.” See *TOP*, 3: 796.)

¹³⁰ *TOP*, 3: 800. Ultimately at least five prominent Mahasabha members signed the Bombay Conference statement: Mookerjee, Maheshwar Dayal, N.C. Chatterjee, Narendra Nath and V.V. Kalikar. See *TOP*, 3: 808.

¹³¹ *TOP*, 3: 799. Could the Bombay organizers’ claim that Savarkar had indicated support for their resolution been a subterfuge to “smoke him out,” a means of compelling the Mahasabha President to take a clear stand on Gandhi’s release? There is nothing to suggest this. Rather, it appears the organizers were trying to embellish their claims of support so as to place maximum pressure on the British. According to Jayakar, when he asked about the claim of Savarkar’s support, Munshi “looked very guilty and Rajaji exchanged a significant glance with me indicating that I should not press the matter too hard.” As cited in Copley, 212,

Before considering the broader implications of this statement, two points need to be made. The first is that Savarkar's stand on Gandhi's release accorded with that of the colonial authorities. Even in its wording Savarkar's position was almost identical to that of the Viceroy. On the demand of the Bombay Leaders' Conference for Gandhi's release and a new attempt to resolve the political deadlock Linlithgow wrote:

my own feeling is still that we must take our stand on what I said to Gandhi in the course of my correspondence with him, viz. that if he is prepared to withdraw from the resolution of last August (which would of course include also the complete withdrawal of his references to 'rebellion' and 'do or die') and to give satisfactory assurances for the future, the matter can then be considered.¹³²

Secondly, in openly siding with the British and opposing Gandhi's release, Savarkar effectively burnt his bridges with the Non-Party Leaders group and placed himself in conspicuous opposition to mainstream Indian big business and elite Hindu political opinion. Earlier Savarkar had sought to hitch the Non-Party Leaders Conference to the Mahasabha train. This was not an unreasonable hope. Sapru's closest political ally and confidante was M.R. Jayakar, a former president of the Bombay Provincial Hindu Sabha who regularly gave Savarkar the benefit of his counsel. Many "moderates" shared the Mahasabha's apprehensions about the INC's approach to the communal unity and socio-economic reform. Yet Savarkar's incendiary communalist rhetoric, deep hostility toward Gandhi and the Congress, and dogged pursuit of a Mahasabha-British alliance ultimately alienated the "moderates."

Bhide defended Savarkar's refusal to support the Bombay Leaders' resolution. "To ask for the unconditional release of Gandhiji," he wrote, "was to demand 'liberty

¹³² *TOP*, 3: 807.

without liability’.”¹³³ The colonial authorities, for their part, were quick to make use of Savarkar’s statement. In advising the Secretary of State on the points he should make in a coming British parliamentary debate on India, Linlithgow observed, “[T]he Hindu Mahasabha, an organization of substantial and growing importance, has stood aside [from the Bombay conference]” and its President, Savarkar, “disassociates himself from its conclusions.”¹³⁴ The Viceroy’s formal reply to an April 1, 1943 memorandum from a Leaders’ Conference deputation also made prominent mention of Savarkar in arguing that the Conference had been unrepresentative of Indian opinion.¹³⁵

There is great unintended irony in Savarkar, the Mahasabha ideologue and erstwhile nationalist terrorist, demanding of Gandhi that he renounce violence. For the better part of two decades, the Mahasabha had made Gandhi’s doctrine of non-violence central to its critique of his leadership of the Congress. By preaching *ahimsa*, Gandhi had sapped Hindus of their martial prowess and prevented them from vigorously defending and asserting their interests against Muslim aggression, or so said the Mahasabha. In his Presidential address to the Mahasabha’s 1940 Madura session, Savarkar condemned the “moral perversity” of Gandhi’s doctrine of “absolute” non-violence: “[T]he time has surely come to take this doctrinal plague quite seriously and to counteract it as quickly as possible”—it is “absolutely immoral,” a “crime.”¹³⁶ Savarkar routinely contrasted the Mahasabha’s promotion of militarism and its purported readiness to countenance an armed uprising against British rule, if conditions were propitious, to the INC’s effete, if not effeminate, civil disobedience strategy. As proof of his nationalist *bona fides*,

¹³³ Bhide, 44.

¹³⁴ *TOP*, 3: 833.

¹³⁵ The Viceroy’s statement is reproduced in K.M. Munshi (ed.) *Indian Constitutional Documents*, V. 1, 430.

¹³⁶ *Savarkar Writings*, 422, 423, 425 and 426.

Savarkar also habitually made references to his terrorist past: "So far as the 'Quit India' is concerned, it is enough to point out that some of the outstanding Mahasabha leaders and followers today ... rose in armed revolt when Gandhiji and some of the present leaders of the Congress were singing Hallelujahs to the British Empire ..." ¹³⁷ Last but not least, the Mahasabha's alliance with the British had been principally justified as a means of militarizing Hindus, that is making them proficient in mass violence.

This brings us to the obvious question, what drove Savarkar to mimic British propaganda, condemn Gandhi for fomenting rebellion, and demand that he and the Congress forswear violence in opposing the colonial regime?

Certainly, Savarkar had reason to fear Gandhi. The Mahatma's release would have boosted the Congress and exacerbated the already acute differences within the Mahasabha over its attitude toward the British regime and the war effort. But by the second week of March any prospect that Gandhi would soon be freed had evaporated. Having withstood the furor over Gandhi's fast, the colonial authorities were hardly about to climb down and order him released.

Frustration at Gandhi's unique ability to rouse popular support, dominate the political debate, and thereby marginalize the Mahasabha may have prompted Savarkar to lash out against the Congress leader. But the content and wording of Savarkar's statement suggest it was intended for the Viceroy's ear. Around this time Savarkar submitted to the Viceroy—unsolicited—the Mahasabha's nominees to fill the three Executive Council posts vacated during Gandhi's fast (Actually, these were Savarkar's nominees since he

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 471.

had not obtained authorization from the Mahasabha Working Committee before selecting and forwarding Linlithgow his panel.)¹³⁸

This said, I would submit that Savarkar's denunciation of Gandhi for supporting violence was more than simply a case of the Mahasabha President currying favor with the government or, in a fit of pique, clutching at the readiest and most cogent argument at hand to justify the quarantining of a powerful political rival. Hailing from a family of landlords, Savarkar was a man of decided illiberal views on socio-economic questions. In urging Hindus to remove caste disabilities, he claimed that the problem of untouchability could "be solved without a farthing's cost."¹³⁹ Much of political debate in India in the 1940s, and not just among avowed leftists and Congressmen, but even on the Viceroy's Council, revolved around how to provide for India's impoverished masses. But this issue was absent from Savarkar's program. As discussed earlier, his attempts to rally the princes and the *zamindars* and *talugdars* of north India were part of a deliberate strategy to develop a right-wing opposition to the Congress and its reformist socio-economic agenda. In denouncing Gandhi's violence Savarkar was articulating the fears of important sections of the Mahasabha's constituency which had seen in the Quit India movement the specter of social revolution.

* * *

Savarkar remained Mahasabha president until December 1944, but for most of this period his leadership was contested. The biggest bone of contention was his call for the Mahasabhites to try to form coalition ministries in the provinces under Governor's rule. In promoting coalition ministries—whether in the Muslim-majority or Hindu-

¹³⁸ Mehr Chand Khanna to Maheshwar Dayal 25 May 1943; Moonje to Mehr Chand Khanna, SPM Papers, II-IV Installment, File 57.

¹³⁹ *Savarkar, Writings*, 499.

majority provinces—Savarkar was once again pursuing a policy that dovetailed with the plans of India's colonial overlords. The *Raj* favored the formation of such ministries because it believed that the façade of legislative government might mollify international concern over the suppression of the Quit India agitation.

Savarkar pressed for the Mahasabha to form coalition ministries wherever possible, in concert with the League if needed, and even if the prospective ministry had a legislative majority only because of the absence of Congress deputies jailed or otherwise legally encumbered for anti-*Raj* activities. According to Savarkar, the belief that “a party in majority in the legislature” alone has the moral authority and democratic legitimacy “to make and unmake ministries” was a “boorish superstition.”¹⁴⁰

Only one such coalition was ever established—in one of the lesser provinces, Sind, and in conjunction with the Muslim League. Nonetheless, Savarkar's coalition gambit proved to be highly damaging to the standing of the Hindu Mahasabha and to his own political reputation. It further identified the Mahasabha with an increasingly unpopular colonial regime, undercut the Mahasabha's claim to be the most resolute opponent of the Muslim League, and caused much internal strife within the Mahasabha. Ultimately Savarkar's policy was repudiated, but not before the Sind Hindu Mahasabha suffered debilitating defections, the Mahasabha-aligned party in the NWFP Assembly disintegrated, and relations between Savarkar and Mookerjee soured.

Mookerjee and most of the Bengal Mahasabhites were up in arms over Savarkar's policy, because they perceived the League as their worst enemy, especially when the League was able to return to power with the help of the Bengal governor. Many could not believe that Savarkar who had scuttled negotiations with the League over a

¹⁴⁰ *Hindu Outlook*, 9 June 1943.

communal-constitutional settlement could favor forming coalition ministries with the self-same League.

In June 1944, after a year of wrangling, Savarkar's policy was formally rescinded. The all-India Working Committee voted that cooperation with the Muslim League was impermissible as long as the League remained committed to Pakistan.¹⁴¹ At the same meeting, Savarkar made known a promise he had already made Mookerjee—he would not stand for re-election as Mahasabha President.

¹⁴¹ *IAR*, II, 1944: 195.

Part Three: Thrice Thwarted—the Hindu Mahasabha Unravels, 1945-1952

Between 1945 and 1952 the All-India Hindu Mahasabha was thrice relaunched under new leaders, only to find itself once again pushed to the political margins. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee led the Mahasabha to a crushing defeat in the 1945 elections. L.B. Bhoptakar and other close associates of Savarkar revived the Mahasabha after an eruption of unprecedented communal violence in the late summer and fall of 1946. Less than 18 months later, the Mahasabha found itself a target of state repression and public opprobrium due to its links to Gandhi's assassins. N.B. Khare spearheaded a third unsuccessful effort to make the Mahasabha a dynamic, mass-based, right-wing, anti-Congress party. But barely a million Indians voted for the Mahasabha in the 1952 general elections, the first since India became independent.

Chapter 6 traces the failure of Mookerjee's attempt to recast the Mahasabha as a Hindu "people's party" allied with the Congress against the British and the Muslim League. The Congress was ready to consider an electoral alliance with the Mahasabha for the 1945 elections. But Mookerjee's position was undermined by a rapid decline in Mahasabha support, especially after the British excluded the Mahasabha from the 1945 Simla conference. Some Mahasabhites resented Mookerjee's courting of the "anti-Hindu" Congress; others concluded their interests would be better served by joining the Congress outright. Chapter 7 shows how the tumultuous events surrounding the independence and partition of British India revived, radicalized, and further divided the Hindu Mahasabha. In the communal cauldron of 1946-47, the Mahasabha became even more communally aggressive, its leaders routinely inciting Hindus to anti-Muslim violence. Many Mahasabhites also connived with the princely and landlord orders in opposing Congress-

rule and upholding aristocratic privilege. Yet Mookerjee's perspective of a Hindu Mahasabha-Congress alliance also came closer to realization than ever before. The Congress joined with Mookerjee and the Bengal Hindu Sabha to secure Bengal's communal partition, then named Mookerjee a minister of the new Dominion. Chapter 8 examines the foundering of the Congress-Mahasabha alliance, following the assassination of M.K. Gandhi, and the ultimate attempt to revive the HMS in anticipation of independent India's first general election.

In tracing the Mahasabha's evolution through to 1952, this narrative breaks with common historiographic practice. That August 15, 1947 is not an appropriate point to end a discussion of the Hindu Mahasabha can be readily demonstrated. Even as Mookerjee was being sworn into the Nehru cabinet, the UP Hindu Mahasabha, with the support of many prominent *zamindars*, was mounting "direct action" against the provincial Congress Ministry and agitating for India to become a Hindu *Raj*. This speaks to a broader issue. While the creation of the Dominions of India and Pakistan constitute the decisive turning point in the history of 20th century South Asia, many critical questions concerning the shape of independent India—including, the fate of the princely states, the place of the Muslim minority in the Indian polity, and the scope and scale of land reform—remained open. They were to be decided in the four and a half years between the proclamation of independence and the confirmation of Congress political dominance in the 1952 elections.

Chapter 6: Marginalization amidst mounting communal and class strife—the short reign of S.P. Mookerjee

At the Hindu Mahasabha's December 1944 session, a physically and politically enfeebled V.D. Savarkar bowed out as president, thus permitting Shyama Prasad Mookerjee to assume uncontested control of the organization. Mookerjee, thereupon, initiated a campaign to reorient the Hindu Mahasabha. In keeping with the course he had been pursuing in Bengal, Mookerjee distanced the Mahasabha from the colonial regime and promoted it as an ally of the Indian National Congress in the fight against the *Raj* and Pakistan. Similarly, Mookerjee sought to recast the Mahasabha as a party of the "masses not the classes." In its propaganda for the 1945 Central Assembly elections, the Mahasabha advanced an economic plan purportedly "based on the principles of socialism."¹

Mookerjee's attempt to relaunch the Mahasabha failed and failed spectacularly, but not for want of encouragement from the Congress right-wing. The Congress leadership repeatedly signalled its readiness to collaborate with a Mookerjee-led Mahasabha. If a formal alliance proved impossible to negotiate, it was because Mookerjee's bargaining position was undercut by his organization's rapid disintegration in the latter half of 1945. Many of the Mahasabha's elite and right-wing supporters objected to its new, anti-*Raj* rhetoric. Other Mahasabhites, impressed by the surge in popular support for the now unbanned INC and by the Congress leadership's increasingly strident rhetoric against Pakistan and Communism, defected to the party of Gandhi, Nehru and Patel.

¹ *Mahasava Parliamentary Board Bulletin No. 1—The Coming Elections: Congress vs. Mahasava, Questions and Answers*, 9. SPM II-IV: File 74, Part 1.

In an August 1945 letter to Viceroy Wavell, Mookerjee boasted that the Mahasabha had the support of “millions of Hindus throughout India” and suggested it would win 30 percent of the Hindu vote in the coming elections.² In fact, less than 1 percent of those who cast ballots in the Central Assembly’s general constituencies voted for Mahasabha candidates. Anticipating defeat, many prominent Mahasabhites refused to stand for election. Others withdrew their candidacies or stopped campaigning. Summarizing the outcome of the Mahasabha’s intervention in the 1945-46 Central and provincial legislative elections, B.S. Moonje declared, the Mahasabha “has been for all practical purposes wiped out.”³

From August 1942 the Mahasabha was torn by internal conflict and increasingly politically marginalized. Nevertheless, one event stands out in the Mahasabha’s unravelling. The Government of India excluded the Mahasabha from the conference it convened at Simla in late June 1945 to discuss the formation of a “popular,” interim national government. By so doing, the British brought a very public end to their patronage of the Mahasabha and rendered, albeit unintentionally, a devastating verdict on the Mahasabha’s war-time policy. For five years, Savarkar had argued that support for the *Raj* and the British war effort were necessary to ensure the Mahasabha’s participation in a post-war constitutional conference. But now with the war won, the British shunted the Mahasabha aside so as to pursue an accommodation with the Mahasabha’s Congress and Muslim League rivals. “Wavell’s Bomb shell has directly hit the Mahasabha organization,” concluded a Bengali Mahasabhite.⁴

² S.P. Mookerjee to Wavell, 25 August 1945, *TOP*: 6, 165.

³ B.S. Moonje Circular Letter, 4 December, 1946, HMS C-94.

⁴ Kuma Mitra to S.P. Mookerjee, 15 June 1945, HMS P-55.

This chapter will trace Mookerjee's attempt to reposition the Hindu Mahasabha, from his assumption of the Mahasabha Presidency through the Mahasabha's debacle in the 1945-46 legislative elections. Particular attention will be given to the negotiations Mookerjee and other Mahasabha leaders held with the Congress over an electoral alliance. This chapter will also probe the British decision to exclude the Mahasabha from the Simla conference and sketch the Mahasabha's organizational collapse in the fall and winter of 1945-46. It will argue that the plummet in Mahasabha support must be seen within the context of mounting anti-*Raj* sentiment, communal strife, and socio-economic unrest. Ironically, the Mahasabha was caught in the undertow of communal political polarization. Elite apprehensions about the scope and scale of popular unrest also played a significant role in the collapse of Mahasabha support.

Mookerjee's Re-orientation of the Mahasabha

In his maiden speech as President, Mookerjee repeated the Mahasabha's stock criticisms of Congress policy, but concluded with an appeal for the "combination of all nationalist elements" against British rule. Mookerjee's December 1944 Bilaspur address was also noteworthy for the renewed emphasis it placed on the internal reform of Hindu society. Mookerjee proclaimed the eradication of untouchability to be the organization's foremost social goal and urged the Mahasabha faithful to recognize the centrality of social service in rekindling religious pride and consolidating the Hindu race. "While the political aspect of the Indian problem must absorb the close attention of the Mahasabha, ... ours," Mookerjee insisted, "is not only a political organization." The incoming president's reformulation of the Mahasabha's mission, had a dual purpose. It cast the

rivalry between the Congress and the Mahasabha in a new light, suggesting each had a rightful role; it directed the Mahasabhites to turn their attention to India's toiling masses. If the Mahasabha remained "an organization confined only to a section of the educated uppers classes" it would, warned Mookerjee, "prove a dismissal failure."⁵

Neither Mookerjee's call for a Mahasabha offensive against untouchability nor his appeal for "close contact with labour and kishans (*sic*)" was novel. The Mahasabha's 1942 session had authorized the drafting of a Charter of Rights and Responsibilities in response to "considerable criticism" of the Mahasabha's lack of "any programme for peasants and industrial labour."⁶ But Mookerjee's address and the resolutions adopted at Bilapur represented a shift, if only in rhetoric. Some Mahasabhites now professed to be proponents of "Hindu socialism."

Behind this shift lay a growing apprehension among those Mahasabhites not blinded by communal venom and/or class privilege that their organization had failed to capitalize on the opportunities presented it by the suppression of the Congress. Outside of the small strata of urban, propertied Hindus and the even smaller layer of big landlords, support for the Mahasabha remained negligible. Meanwhile, key Mahasabha rivals, first and foremost the Muslim League, but also the Communist Party, had made demonstrable progress in rooting themselves among the masses. Even British war propaganda, with its talk of a Peoples' War against fascism and portrayal of victory as the first step to social progress, had contributed to the groundswell of democratic and egalitarian sentiment. Meantime, Indian big business had moved to harness for its own

⁵ S.P. Mookerjee, Address to the All-India Hindu Mahasabha, 26th Session, Bilaspur, 24th December 1944, reprinted in "Appendix" to S.P. Mookerjee *Awake Hindusthan* (Calcutta: Romesh Chandra Banerjee, 1944) 12-14, 25-26, and 37-38.

⁶ *Mahratta*, 15 January 1943.

purposes the growing public enthusiasm for state action to reduce social inequality and promote economic development, publishing in January 1944 a scheme for land reform and state-led industrialization (the so-called Bombay Plan).

The Bilaspur Mahasabha session passed resolutions that authorized the formulation of a “radical programme for the agrarian and labour population” and the establishment of Mahasabha “kisan and labor” fronts, reaffirmed support for the fledgling Mahila Hindu Mahasabha, and outlined the “basic principles” of an economic plan for India. The economic policy resolution was written by L.B. Bhopatkar, the Maharashtran Mahasabhite leader who in 1936-37 had joined with Moonje in arguing for a definitive break with the Congress because of its alleged affinity for Communism. Bhopatkar’s resolution outlined the key tenets of an economic plan framed “to avoid the evils of capitalism” and “secure all the benefits of socialism.” But its most radical proposals—the nationalization of land, legal limits on the rate of profit, and worker representation in management—were deleted by the Subjects Committee.⁷

Neither the advocacy of Hindu Socialism, nor Mookerjee’s promise of “spiritual equality” made any impression on India’s toiling masses. They preferred to support organizations that had a record of championing their demands for social change in the here and now. The Mahasabha’s war-time alliance with the *Raj* had only reinforced the popular perception that it was an organization of Rajas and *Rai Bahadhurs*. And at all levels of the Mahasabha, many remained resistant to Mookerjee’s call for the Mahasabha to fraternize and identify with the “exploited and down-trodden.”⁸ Complained Mookerjee in January 1946: “Many of our men were not prepared to vitalise the

⁷ *Hindu Outlook*, 1 December 1944 and 12 January 1945; “The Resolutions Passed in the 26th Session of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha held at Bilaspur on the 24th, 25th & 26th December 1944,” HMS C-59.

⁸ S.P. Mookerjee, “Appendix”, *Awake Hindusthan*, 25.

organization in a way that would bring us in direct contact with the masses.”⁹ Similar sentiments were voiced by Mahasabha cadre. After touring Maharashtra in the summer of 1945, the Mahasabha’s Zonal Organizer for the region reported, “The Hindu Sabha of any [*sic*] place is not paying any particular attention to redress the grievances of the public.”¹⁰

Hindu Outlook editorials published just before and right after the Bilaspur session provide a window into the difficulties the Mahasabha confronted in broadening its appeal. The first conceded that the Mahasabha had hitherto been an “organisation of the rich only, with little or no access from the poor” and cited approvingly Jayakar’s observation that this was because the Hindu Mahasabha “has carried no message of hope or help” for the “poorer classes.” The second warned that if the Mahasabha heeded Mookerjee’s call to take up socio-economic issues it would undermine its principal goal—Hindu unity in the communal power struggle—since such issues “are very likely to cause irreconcilable differences among those who are one on this essential objective.” In other words, support no matter how feeble for the socio-economic grievances of the masses risked alienating the Mahasabha’s wealthy and orthodox supporters.¹¹

Parmanand and the *Hindu Outlook* were also quick to take issue with Mookerjee’s orientation toward the Congress. In an editorial published in the 9 January 1945 *Hindu Outlook*, Parmanand said he had “grave misgivings” about Mookerjee’s attempt to align the Hindu nationalists with the Congress in the fight for independence: “If the Mahasabha is to live, and carry out its mission it must have to raise its own banner challenging that of the Congress.”

⁹ S.P. Mookerjee, *Diary*, 96.

¹⁰ H.B. [Hari Bhaskar] Bhide to S.P. Mookerjee, 1 August 1945, HMS C-64, Part II.

¹¹ *Hindu Outlook*, 26 December 1944 and 2 January 1945.

Although Mookerjee took the Mahasabha in a new direction, he refrained from criticizing his predecessor. This was not simply a question of tact. He recognized that many of the Mahasabha's most devoted workers were staunch followers of Savarkar. As for Savarkar himself, he withdrew from active participation in the leadership of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha, choosing instead to focus his attention on the Mahasabha's Maharashtran wing and the Hindu Rashtra Dal. But when Mookerjee, as part of his attempts to reposition the Mahasabha, proposed that the ranks of the Mahasabha be thrown open to Muslims and other non-Hindus, Savarkar publicly protested. Mookerjee quickly dropped the issue.¹²

The pro-Congress press welcomed Mookerjee's emergence at the helm of the Mahasabha.¹³ Even more importantly, there was increasing collaboration between Congressmen and Mahasabhites. In April 1945 a Mahasabhite, Debandra Nath Mukerjee, was elected Mayor of Calcutta with the votes of aldermen aligned with the Bose faction of the Bengal Congress.¹⁴ Two months earlier, Mehr Chand Khanna, the best-known Mahasabhite in the NWFP and, since 1943, the secretary of the Congress Party in the NWFP had legislature, met with Gandhi as part of a three-man NWFP delegation seeking the Mahatma's sanction for the Congress resuming provincial office. Whilst some Mahasabhites had complained that Khanna was focussing on Congress politics to the detriment of building the NWFP Hindu Sabha, Mookerjee had co-opted

¹² Walter Andersen, "The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. Part 3," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 25 March 1972 680; *Hindu Outlook*, 4 September 1945.

¹³ *Hindu Outlook*, 9 January 1945.

¹⁴ Bengal Governor Casey to Colville, 2 May 1945, *Bengal Documents*, 3: 83.

him onto the Working Committee and when the Frontier Congress resumed office he sent Khanna his hearty congratulations.¹⁵

The INC leadership's readiness to cooperate with a Mookerjee-led Hindu Mahasabha would be underscored by the events surrounding the Simla conference. At the very point at which the British withdrew their patronage, the Congress extended its hand to the Mahasabha.

The Simla Conference and the sundering of the Anglo-Hindu alliance

The end of the war in Europe and Japan's crumbling military position removed Britain's principal excuse for refusing to consider any changes to India's constitution. The prospect of a severe post-war economic crisis was a further reason the British decided to reopen negotiations with India's political leaders in June 1945. A government "more representative of organized [Indian] political opinion" would, *Raj* strategists calculated, have greater legitimacy in slashing state expenditure and contending with social unrest.¹⁶

On June 14, the Viceroy announced that the British Indian government was inviting Indian political leaders to Simla to negotiate the formation of an interim national government that would administer the country till a new constitution could be agreed

¹⁵ Amit Kumar Gupta, 160; Correspondence with Mehr Chand Khanna in HMS P-64; Mehr Chand Khanna to S.P. Mookerjee, 19 March 1945, Mehr Chand Khanna Correspondence File, SPM II-IV.

Although the NWFP was India's smallest province, the return to power of the NWFP Congress was of all-India significance because it was the first time that the INC had accepted provincial office since its resignation of its ministries in the fall of 1939.

¹⁶ *TOP*, 5: 1122. As regards the anticipated post-war economic crisis, Wavell wrote: "At the end of the Japanese war, we shall be faced immediately with demobilization, the dispersal of labour from war factories, and the winding up of vast war-time clerical establishments. All this will cause unemployment and discontent, since it will not be possible to divert war effort into peace-time channels at once. We can hope for no quick improvement in the food position and the other economic troubles caused by the war. Our political prisoners—with some exceptions—will have to be released, and will find explosive material ready to their hands." (*TOP*, 5: 38).

upon. At the same time, Wavell announced the immediate release of the Congress Working Committee members detained since August 1942.¹⁷

The composition of the conference caused consternation among the sitting members of the Viceroy's Council and others who had identified themselves unreservedly with the British war effort, since it made clear that India's colonial overlords viewed the Congress and the Muslim League as their principal interlocutors in refurbishing India's government and remaking its constitution. None were more agitated than the Hindu Mahasabhis. While the government invited one representative of the Depressed Classes political elite and Master Tara Singh of the Sikh Akali Dal to the Simla Conference, the Mahasabha was excluded. Lamented Bhai Parmanand, "[T]he British Government makes it a rule to win the favour of their opponents and ignore those that stand with them in the time of adversity. . . . [T]hey treat the Hindu Mahasabha with scant courtesy."¹⁸

The Mahasabha's exclusion stoked its opposition to the British scheme for an interim government. But the Mahasabhis had two other major objections to the so-called Wavell Plan. The Viceroy stipulated that the new Executive Council "would include equal proportions of caste Hindus and Muslims."¹⁹ The Mahasabha deemed the principle of parity at the Center—which had formed the basis of a scheme for national government reached in early 1945 between the Congressman Bhulabhai Desai and the Muslim Leaguer Liaquat Ali—to be even worse than Pakistan. According to Mookerjee, the proposal that Gandhi had made to Jinnah in the summer of 1944, "envisaged Pakistan only in certain parts of the country, but the Wavell Plan Pakistanises the whole of

¹⁷ For the full text of Wavell's broadcast see *TOP*, 5: 1122-1124.

¹⁸ HMS C-64 Part 2, Item 51-52.

¹⁹ *TOP*, 5: 1122.

Hindustan."²⁰ Furthermore, in promoting their proposals, the British increasingly depicted the Congress as the political representative of India's caste Hindus and the Hindu counterpoint to the Muslim League. For the Mahasabhites, this was an outrage. The refusal of the Congress to define itself as a Hindu body and spokesman for Hindu interests was, in the Mahasabhites' view, akin to its original sin. In pursuit of the unnatural and will of the wisp concept of a composite Indian nation, the Congress, or so argued the Mahasabhites, had sought to stamp out Hindu self-consciousness.

At an emergency meeting, a little more than a week after Wavell's broadcast, the Mahasabha Working Committee called for an all-India mobilization against the Wavell Plan.²¹ Mookerjee accused a "powerful combination of conspirators, British Imperialists, the Muslim League and the Congress," of "working to destroy Hindu Nationalism" and urged Hindus to "resist this onslaught."²² At the same time the Mahasabhites appealed to anti-*Raj* sentiment, deploring Britain's refusal to limit the powers of the Viceroy or make any other change to India's constitution. This dual message was given expression in the two main slogans of the Mahasabha's anti-Wavell Plan agitation. The Mahasabhite faithful were urged to chant, "The Congress is surrendering the banner of nationalism to British Imperialism" and "Appeaser Gandhiji is handing over the democratic Hindus to the communalist Jinnah."²³ According to government reports, public support for the Mahasabha's "anti-Wavell week" was "very slight." Gorakhpur was one of the few centres, to be affected by the "All-India Hartal Day" the Mahasabha called for July 8.²⁴

Assessing reaction to the *Raj*'s interim government initiative, Wavell wrote:

²⁰ *Hindu Outlook*, 3 July 1945.

²¹ *Hindu Outlook*, 3 July 1945.

²² *Hindu Outlook*, 3 July 1945.

²³ *People's War*, 12 August 1945.

²⁴ *UP Intelligence Abstracts*, 13 July 1945, 109-110.

The main dissentients to the proposals as a whole were, I think, the more extreme members of the Mahasabha who objected strongly to parity within the Executive Council between Caste Hindus and Muslims; and some of the landed and propertied classes who have been content in the past to lean on 'Government' and had made no attempt to establish themselves in politics.²⁵

In fact, as this thesis has shown, these two groups overlapped.

The failure of the Simla conference gave the Mahasabhites little comfort. The Congress and the government had conceded the League demand for Muslim-Hindu parity on the Viceroy's Council. Wavell's decision to abandon the interim government plan and close the Simla conference rather than proceed in the face of Jinnah's opposition attested to the importance the *Raj* placed on the League. And even as the British had rehabilitated the Congress and begun negotiations to bring it into government, they had effectively delegitimized the Mahasabha by excluding it from the Simla deliberations.

During the war's opening year, the *Raj* had dramatically raised the Mahasabha's stature. By August 1940, Viceroy Linlithgow was describing it as India's third great political organization. The Mahasabha's ascendance was bound up with its support for the war and hostility to the Congress, which the British feared could launch a new anti-*Raj* agitation. The Mahasabha's demotion was just as quick and likewise bound up with the vicissitudes of British policy, especially as regards the Congress. For reasons that will be elaborated below, the Mahasabha was deemed to be an impediment to the *Raj*'s post-war imperative of securing British economic and geo-political interests in India by striking the best possible bargain with the Congress. Whereas in the past the British had exaggerated Mahasabha strength, now that their political priorities had shifted, they

²⁵ Wavell to Amery, 15 July 1945, *TOP*, 5: 1259.

downplayed it. Declared an India Office hand: "We have never extracted from India a clear appreciation of the political strength of Hindu Mahasabha."²⁶

It could be argued that the Mahasabha's exclusion was not a considered decision, since it was reversed, then reversed again in the final days before the Simla Conference. This argument, however, cannot stand scrutiny. By the time of Wavell's broadcast, the list of invitees to Simla and the composition of an interim government had been under discussion in the *Raj*'s top echelons for almost ten months.²⁷ Whilst in a September 1944 memorandum Wavell had said "it might be necessary to include a representative of the Mahasabha," by February 1945 he had resolved to deny the Mahasabha a seat on his Council.²⁸ In answer to a suggestion from the Secretary of State that he consider a bigger executive so as to provide for the inclusion of a Punjab Hindu or a Mahasabhite, Wavell wrote, "The Mahasabha under its present control has a narrow communal outlook, and is as anti-British as the Congress."²⁹ By the time the British War Cabinet ratified the Wavell Plan, *Raj* strategists had decided that the furthest they should go in the direction of placating the Mahasabha would be to name Malaviya's long-time ally Aney to the new Executive Council and to invite to Simla the head of the moribund [Congress] Nationalist Party. But the Viceroy faced a quasi-revolt, when he informed his existing Council of the list of conference invitees and the plan for an interim government. Angered that the British were shunting them aside so as to consort with the Congress, a majority of the Indian members of the Council—7 in all—signed a statement denouncing the plan, especially the failure to provide representation to "those who have supported the war

²⁶ "Minutes by Mr. Gibson and Mr. Patrick," *TOP*, 6: 260.

²⁷ See Chapters 1 through 4 of *The Simla Conference—Background and Proceedings, 1 September 1944-28 July 1945*, *TOP*, 5.

²⁸ *TOP*, 5: 40.

²⁹ Wavell to Amery, 11 February 1945, *TOP*, 5: 541-542.

effort.”³⁰ To appease the Council, which was strongly in favor of the Mahasabha’s participation in the Simla Conference, Wavell then wrote to Secretary of State Amery to say that Mookerjee should be invited.³¹ This reversal, however, occasioned a strong protest from the Bengal Governor who accused Mookerjee of having been insufficiently supportive of the *Raj*. Confirmed in his original view, Wavell telegraphed Amery to insist that the “communally bitter” Mookerjee be struck from the list of Simla invitees.³²

Several interconnected considerations lay at the root of the British decision to marginalize the Mahasabha. They recognized it to be weak and divided and deemed it insufficiently pliant to their interests. At the same time, the British feared that because of its volatility and communal extremism, the Mahasabha could be disruptive of their attempts to use the communal question and the Muslim League to temper Congress ambitions. There was one further reason for the British not to invite the Mahasabha to Simla: the participation of an organization that professed to speak for Hindu political interests would have called into question their communal construction of the Indian problem as a clash between the Muslim League and a Hindu Indian National Congress.

In the months following the Simla conference, British opposition to the Mahasabha hardened. Commenting on a letter from Mookerjee to the Viceroy, a *Raj* strategist argued against “do[ing] business” with the Mahasabha and “artificially enhanc[ing] its bargaining strength. Its leaders, at feud among themselves, would merely act as a stalking horse for Congress.”³³

³⁰ Wavell to Amery, 7 June 1945, *TOP*, 5: 1089-1091.

³¹ Wavell to Amery 7 June 1945, *TOP*, 5: 1092.

³² Wavell to Amery, 9 June 1945, *TOP*, 5: 1110-1111.

³³ “Minutes by Mr. Gibson and Mr. Patrick,” *TOP*, 6: 260.

Although Mookerjee accused the Congress of complicity in the Mahasabha's exclusion from the Simla deliberations, in truth the Congress leadership was anxious for the Mahasabha to be part of any settlement with the British. The Congress included Mookerjee on its list of nominees to the Viceroy's Council.³⁴ Subsequently Gandhi promoted Mookerjee's candidacy in a letter to the Viceroy. None of the other Congress nominees—there were 15 in all—received such a personal endorsement from the Mahatma. "You will observe," on the list of Congress nominees, wrote Gandhi to Wavell, "... the President of the Hindu Mahasabha. I think this was necessary and graceful. If you accept the Congress list, may I suggest your inviting Dr. Syma Prasad Mukerji before the meeting of the 14th instant?"³⁵ Congress President A.K. Azad, in submitting his organization's list of nominees to the Viceroy, noted that Mookerjee's name had been included "without obtaining his [Mookerjee's] previous permission."³⁶ In other words, the Congress had invited Mookerjee to join the interim government without precondition, including any limits on the Mahasabha's communal rhetoric and agitation.

Mookerjee, for his part, was quick to disclaim any prior knowledge of the Congress list. His nomination did serve, however, to bring the Congress and Mahasabha closer. Manoranjan Chaudhury, formerly Mookerjee's private secretary and now the Mahasabha's national office secretary, urged his fellow Mahasabhites not to be deterred by the shabby treatment accorded their organization at Simla. "I am ready," declared Chaudhury, "to advise the president of the All India Hindu Mahasabha to offer his hand of cooperation to the president of the Indian National Congress ..."³⁷ His comments were

³⁴ A.K. Azad to Wavell, 7 July 1945, *TOP*, 5: 1204-05.

³⁵ M.K. Gandhi to Wavell, 8 July 1945, *TOP*, 5: 1209.

³⁶ M.K. Azad to Wavell, 7 July 1945, *TOP*, 5: 1203.

³⁷ *Hindu Outlook*, 17 July 1945.

echoed by the Bengal Mahasabha legislator Haridas Majumdar: "It is high time for Congress, Hindu Mahasabha, and Nationalist Muslims to close their ranks and fall in a single line."³⁸

Predictably, Parmanand's *Hindu Outlook* was not amused. In an editorial entitled "Whither the Mahasabha," it declared, "[T]he Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha cannot entangle together. For the Hindus the Congress is a most reactionary organization the only aim of which is to eliminate the Hindu consciousness from India."³⁹

The "Titles Dispute" and Class Frictions in the Mahasabha

When the Mahasabha Working Committee met in mid-August 1945, Indian political circles were abuzz with speculation the British would soon call fresh elections. With a view to strengthening the Mahasabha's anti-*Raj* credentials, the Working Committee passed a resolution instructing all those holding official position in the Mahasabha at the district level or higher to renounce their government titles. Henceforth, "No government title-holder" was to "be eligible for any elective offices in the Hindu Mahasabha."⁴⁰

On the general public the Mahasabha action made no impact, for it was submerged in the Indian nationalist wave generated by the war's end, the release of detained Congress militants, and reports of the Second World War exploits of Subhas Chandra Bose's rebel Indian National Army (INA). Within the Mahasabha, however, the prohibition on titles triggered a tempest. Many title-holders quit the Mahasabha rather than relinquish the honorifics that the *Raj* had bestowed on them. Others chose to ignore

³⁸ *People's War*, 29 July 1945.

³⁹ *Hindu Outlook*, 21 August 1945.

⁴⁰ *IAR*, II, 1945: 155.

the Working Committee's decision, prompting calls from the ranks for disciplinary action against them.

Among the first to resign was *Rai Bahadur* Guru Narain, the President of the Oudh Provincial Hindu Sabha and a leader of the die-hard faction of *taluqdars* that opposed any truck with Congress. Narain's resignation statement well-illustrates that dissent over title renunciation was rooted in opposition to the Mahasabha's new anti-Raj stance. The Kunwar of Maurawan charged that it was the Congress, not Wavell and the British, that had first lent support to the Muslim League's demand for "parity" in an interim national government. "[I]f we, Hindu Mahasabhites, object to it, then in all fairness our fight is with the Congress and not the Viceroy." He went on to warn the Mahasabha against forsaking cooperation with the *Raj*. Declared Narain: "I assert with all the emphasis at my command that Hindus have suffered most in the past because of their non-cooperation policy. ... [T]he main ideology of 'Responsive Cooperation' hitherto followed under the leadership of Veer Savarkar should not be substituted with that of non-cooperation."⁴¹

A month after the Working Committee meeting, Dalip Narayan Singh reported to Mookerjee that two of the Mahasabha's best-known leaders in Bihar had resigned over the titles issues—Rai Narain Arora, the Chairman of the Patna City Municipal Council and ex-president of the Bihar and Orissa Chamber of Commerce, and Raja Sir Raghunandan Prasad Singh, a longtime legislative representative of the province's great landowners. Himself a *Rai Bahadur*, Dalip Narayan Singh urged Mookerjee to suspend

⁴¹ "Press Statement of R.B. Kunwar Guru Narain, Working President of Oudh Provincial Hindu Sabha & member All-India Committee of Hindu Mahasabha objecting to Hindu Mahasabha's call for Hindu Mahasabha office-bearers to give up their titles." Undated. SPM II-IV, File, 96

application of the titles-resolution in Bihar “for a year or two.” Otherwise “the entire structure” of the Hindu Sabha in Bihar “will fail.”⁴²

Gopi Nath Kunzru, a prominent UP Mahasabhite, suggested that the titles issue had been raised so as to exclude Sir J.P. Srivastava from the Mahasabha leadership.⁴³ Certainly, that was not Mookerjee’s motivation. But, among the Hindu Mahasabha cadre, especially in UP, there was growing animosity to the notables and some Mahasabahites definitely were seeking a means to free the Mahasabha from their grip. The Mahasabhite ranks were no firebrands for socio-economic reform. Still, the popular egalitarian spirit then percolating across India could not but impact on them and strengthen the rank-and-file challenge to notable control of the Mahasabha.

A UP correspondent appealed to Mookerjee to support the merger of the Agra and Oudh Provincial Hindu Sabhas into a single organization. Then “we can exclude the Talukdars + other selfish groups & with Mohantji [Mahant Digvijay Nath] we can [make] UP Hindu Sabha a powerful body.”⁴⁴ Similar sentiments were voiced by one of the leading Mahasabha activists in the Punjab. In a letter written shortly before the August 1945 Working Committee meeting, Hardayal Devgun reported that the Mahasabha’s heavy defeat in a Lahore by-election was largely attributable to the INC’s success in labelling the Hindu Mahasabha “an organization of title holders.” Devgun urged Mookerjee to use a title-renunciation campaign to cull the Mahasabha’s ranks, which were “thick with self seekers and job hunters.”

[T]hese title holders are proving to be a liability and not an asset to the organisation. They seldom do any service. Sitting tight to their social position they can at the most issue a few statement [*sic*], which carry no

⁴² Dalip Narayan Singh to SPM 24 September 1945: SPM II-IV, File 74, Part 1.

⁴³ Gopi Nath Kunzru to S.P. Mookerjee, 5 September 1945: SPM II-IV, File 96.

⁴⁴ Biswanath Agrawal to S.P. Mookerjee, undated, SPM II-IV, File 96.

effect. They lack untiring zeal and unflinching faith. They do not help the organisation even financially. Then what is their use? . . . Such persons exploit the Hindu Mahasabha for their own personal ends.⁴⁵

The Rout of the Hindu Mahasabha in the 1945-46 Elections

Within days of Viceroy Wavell's August 21st announcement of elections, the Mahasabha leadership publicly vowed that it would contest every "Hindu" seat in the Central and Provincial assemblies.⁴⁶ This proved to be a reckless boast. The resignations over the titles dispute were only the first of several waves of desertions and defections. By the time the Central Assembly election results were tabulated in December 1945, the Mahasabha had been reduced to a rump. Writing in March 1946 in the aftermath of the provincial assembly elections, M.R. Jayakar contended that the Mahasabha had suffered "complete ruin."⁴⁷

The Mahasabha election campaign unravelled before it even began. Many of the Mahasabha's best-known leaders—Ganga Nand Sinha in Bihar and Harish Chandra in Delhi, for example—refused to stand for election.⁴⁸ Others, such as the longtime Bengali Mahasabhaite Sanat Roy Chodhury, withdrew their candidacies.⁴⁹ Many of the Hindu Mahasabha's *zamindar* and business supporters sought and bought their entry into the Congress. Other Mahasabhaite placed their political networks at the INC's service. Among the defectors were several of Mookerjee's closest allies in the Mahasabha's

⁴⁵ Hardyal Devgun to S.P. Mookerjee, 9 August 1945, SPM II-IV, File 95, Part 2.

⁴⁶ *Hindu Outlook*, 28 August 1945.

⁴⁷ M.R. Jayakar to Jagdish Prasad, 7 March 1946. Jayakar Papers, File 711.

⁴⁸ V.G. Deshpande to S.P. Mookerjee, 23 September 1945 and Ram Gopal to S.P. Mookerjee, SPM II-IV, File 74, Part 1.

⁴⁹ S.P. Mookerjee, *Diary* 130; Moonje, "General Secretary's report of work from January 1945 to December 1946," HMS C-89.

internal struggles, most importantly the *taluqdar* Maheshwar Dayal and the banker and businessman Mehr Chand Khanna.⁵⁰

To the Mahasabhites' dismay, outside of a few pockets like Meerut, their ostensible Hindu nationalist allies in the RSS refused any assistance.⁵¹ According to a long-time student of the RSS, with the exception of those hailing from the Maharashtran region of the Bombay Presidency, the RSS members who voted in the 1945-46 elections tended to vote Congress.⁵² The RSS leaders were well-positioned to judge Mahasabha strength and, to the extent that the RSS had developed a mass following among the urban petty bourgeois youth of north India, could not but be sensitive to the popular view of the Mahasabha as a club of *Rai Bahadurs* and other notables.

It is difficult to convey the speed and scope of the Mahasabha collapse. In October 1945 Mookerjee was inundated with negative reports concerning the Mahasabha's election readiness. Digvijay Nath, a Gorakhpur *mahant* and rising power in the UP Provincial Hindu Sabha, found "There has been absolutely no work in Oudh."⁵³ The President of the Nabadwip Hindu Sabha warned that the Mahasabha was on the verge of collapse in his area of west-central Bengal, with a "majority of my committee" set to join the Forward Bloc.⁵⁴ V.G. Desphande reported that the Punjab Hindu Mahasabha was in similar disarray:

The state of affair [*sic*] of the Hindusabha at Amballa Cantt. is disgusting. The office-bearers there are all Congressites. They have actually undertaken the work of Congress election propaganda. Mr. Pannala, their secretary, said

⁵⁰ Like Mehr Chand Khanna, Maheshwar Dayal had been brought back onto the HMS Working Committee by Mookerjee. (S.P. Mookerjee to Maheshwar Dayal, 5 October, 1945, SPM II-IV, File 95.)

⁵¹ *UP Intelligence Abstracts*, 19 October 1945, 166, and 9 November 1945, 178.

⁵² Walter Andersen, "The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh," Part 2 *Economic and Political Weekly*, 18 March 1972: 637.

⁵³ Mahant Digvijay Nath to S.P. Mookerjee, 2 October 1945, SPM II-IV, File 96.

⁵⁴ President Nabadwip Hindu Sabha to S.P. Mookerjee, 16 October 1945, SPM II-IV, File 68.

to me 'I would rather vote for a dog set up by Congress than for a Hindusabhaite God.'⁵⁵

The prospect of a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Congress was soon raised by leading Mahasabhites as reason to abandon the electoral battlefield. "I do not see any chance for the Hindu Sabha securing even one seat in the Provincial legislature," Brij Lal, Secretary of both the Punjab Hindu (Election) Board and the Punjab Hindu Vigilance Board, told Mookerjee. "It is believed in sober quarters that by entering into elections with such a weak [sic] organisation Hindu Sabha is un-necessarily courting a rout. ... The result of the defeat in election will be that for many years to come the organisation work of the Hindu Sabha will become difficult in this province."⁵⁶

The Mahasabhites limped to the Central Assembly polls. In the United Provinces the Mahasabha contested only 3 of the 8 General seats and even where it did challenge the Congress, the Mahasabha mounted a "half-hearted" campaign. Pro-Mahasabha propaganda was "almost absent."⁵⁷ According to the Bengal Governor the Mahasabha virtually withdrew from the election.⁵⁸ Perhaps the most devastating depiction of the Mahasabha's collapse was provided by Mookerjee himself:

Those who had stood against the Congress were swept away. Some persons, who had contested as Hindu Mahasabha candidates for their own interest, thought it wise to ditch the party. Some members deserted the party without any notice. Some were bought off. ...

The ideals which I had striven for in the past few years were shattered in one blow. What treachery, deception and selfishness there was all round.⁵⁹

The Mahasabha did not win a single Central Assembly seat. Few if any Mahasabhites even retained their deposits. In the United Provinces, two of the three

⁵⁵ V.G. Deshpande to S.P. Mookerjee, 4 October 1945, SPM II-IV, File 95, Part 2.

⁵⁶ Brij Lal to S.P. Mookerjee, 9 November 1945, SPM II-IV, File 95, Part 2.

⁵⁷ *UP Intelligence Abstracts*, 9 and 23 November 1945, 178 and 185.

⁵⁸ Casey to Wavell, 7 January 1946, *Bengal Documents*: 3, 127.

⁵⁹ S.P. Mookerjee, *Diary*, 127 and 145.

Mahasabha candidates won less than .5 percent of the vote. The other won 4.39 percent.⁶⁰ The Mahasabha had put great emphasis on defeating the Congress nominee for the Delhi Central Assembly seat. Not only was Asif Ali a Muslim Congressman, but he had married a Hindu and considered himself a socialist. The Mahasabha candidate, Ram Singh, benefited from covert support from the Muslim League and the Muslim League-backed candidate, yet he captured just 175 votes as compared to 6,261 for Ali.⁶¹ Bhai Parmanand had not wanted to stand in the elections. Although he was ailing, the veteran Mahasabhaite conceded that the real reason for his reticence was political despondency—"the urge is absent." G.C. Narang's withdrawal, under circumstances that will be discussed below, compelled Parmanand to become the Mahasabha's standard-bearer in the Ambala Division Non-Mohammedan constituency. He won just 569 votes, slightly better than a tenth of the number polled by the victorious Congress candidate.⁶²

The Mahasabha's debacle in the Central Assembly election triggered still further defections. Seven prominent Oudh Mahasabhaite, including the Secretary and General Secretary of the Oudh Provincial Hindu Sabha, resigned en bloc, five of them announcing they were applying to join the Congress.⁶³ At the beginning of 1946 an Orissa Congress leader informed the High Command that Nilkantha Das, who had defected to the Mahasabha at the beginning of World War II, "and his party are approaching some of us to take them in once again."⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Peter Reeves et al., *UP Election Handbook*.

⁶¹ *Hitavada*, 29 November 1945; *People's Age*, 25 November 1945.

⁶² *Hitavada*, 12 December 1945; *Hindu Outlook*, 2 October 1945.

⁶³ *Hitavada*, 31 December 1945, *UP Intelligence Abstracts*, 21 & 28 December 1945, 202.

⁶⁴ H.K. Mahtab to Patel, 4 January 1946, *Sardar's Letters—Mostly Unknown—I*, ed. G.M. Nandurkar (Ahmedabad: Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Smarak Bhawan, 1977) 26-27. [Hereafter *Sardar's Letters*.]

The Congress, for its part, assiduously courted elements in and around the Mahasabha. Dr. Gopal Vinayak Deshmukh was chosen as the Congress candidate for the Bombay City Central Assembly seat although he was well-known to have Mahasabha sympathies and had already sown up the Mahasabha nomination. "[A]ll the persons in our Party were unanimous that he would be the best candidate," explained a Bombay Mahasabha leader.⁶⁵ After all, only two months before Deshmukh had presided over a Hindu Mahasabha public meeting at which he had declared that Hindu legislators "should look after Hindu interests only."⁶⁶ Even a Congress proponent of Deshmukh's candidacy conceded he had often acted "directly against the wishes of the Congress leaders."⁶⁷ K.C. Neogy also negotiated with both the Congress and Hindu Mahasabha for their support, before securing the Congress nomination for the Dacca Non-Mohammedan Central Assembly seat.⁶⁸ In September, the Congress invited V.D. Naidu, a former Mahasabha vice-president and the best known Mahasabhite in south India, to return to the Congress-fold. Naidu took the matter under consideration; then in early December, as it became apparent that the Mahasabha had been routed, announced he was rejoining the Congress.⁶⁹

Although there were instances in which the ill-will left by years of political rivalry could not be overcome, generally the Mahasabha defectors were warmly embraced by the Congress leadership. In October 1945 Congress NWFP MLA Mehr Chand Khanna "very reluctantly" and "with a heavy heart" severed his almost quarter-

⁶⁵ K.H. Dhamdhare to S.P. Mookerjee, 19 October 1945, SPM II-IV, File 77.

⁶⁶ *People's War*, 28 October 1945.

⁶⁷ Jamnadas Dwarkadas to Patel, 19 October 1945 and Patel to Sec. Bombay PCC, 22 October 1945, *Sardar Patel's Correspondence: 1940-50*, 2, ed. Durga Das (Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1972) 108-110. Hereafter *Patel's Correspondence*.

⁶⁸ S.P. Mookerjee, *Diary*, 113.

⁶⁹ B.G. Khaparde to S.P. Mookerjee, 30 September 1945, SPM II-IV, File 74, Part 1; *Hitavada*, 9 December 1945.

century long affiliation with the Hindu Mahasabha. Following the provincial elections, the man who had long been the principal figure in the NWFP Mahasabha was rewarded with the Finance post in a reorganized Congress provincial ministry.⁷⁰ In early November 1945, G.V.Pant, the once and future United Provinces Premier, welcomed Kunwar Jyoti Prasad, a leading *zamindar* and ex vice-president of the Agra Provincial Hindu Sabha, into the Congress. After performing a flag-raising ceremony at Prasad's house, Pant made a laudatory speech, declaring that "Kunwar Sahib had not joined the Congress with any selfish motives, and thus had strengthened both himself and the Congress."⁷¹

The Congress election program contained a commitment to abolish the *zamindari* system, but as a whole the INC's 1945-46 election campaign was much less radical than in 1937. The pivot of the Congress campaign was national unity, not socio-economic reform. Whilst the Congress benefited from a surge in national feeling, prompted by the growing sense that India stood at the threshold of independence, much of the INC's anti-Pakistan rhetoric had a communal tinge. Moreover, some Congress leaders made Mahasabha-type threats of violent resistance to Pakistan. "[T]he loss of a few thousand lives" may prove "necessary to prevent the partitioning of the country," UP Congress leader Purushottamdas Tandon told an Amritsar audience.⁷² Mookerjee, writing shortly after the conclusion of the first round of polling, complained that the Congress had stolen the Mahasabha's thunder. Congress leaders "started speaking against the Muslim League

⁷⁰ Mehr Chand Khanna to S.P. Mookerjee, 8 October 1945. SPM II-IV, File 95, Part 2.

⁷¹ Report from *Leader* of 5 November 1945, reprinted in *Pant Selected Works*, 10: 387.

⁷² Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, 467.

and Mr. Jinnah in the same strain as the Mahasabha used to do, and people thought that there was hardly any difference between the Congress and the Mahasabha.”⁷³

The Muslim League’s campaign for Pakistan provoked a powerful counter-pull for Hindu communal-political unity in the Muslim-majority provinces. Not only did the Congress benefit from this dynamic as the oldest, best-organized, and most popular party among the Hindu masses, but Congress leaders consciously sought to exploit it—arguing that Hindus could best resist Pakistan by voting Congress and that the Hindu Mahasabha could best realize their aims by rallying to the Congress. That the Congress leadership in both Bengal and the Punjab negotiated with leading Mahasabha members over their party’s participation in the elections—negotiations we shall examine in detail below—could only be taken to mean that the Congress was keen to forge Hindu communal unity and alive to Mahasabha concerns. After negotiations in Bengal over a Congress-Hindu Mahasabha electoral pact foundered over whether the Mahasabha merited more than a quarter of the Central Assembly seats, Sarat Chandra Bose chided the Mahasabha for weakening Hindu political strength: “All that the Mahasabha seems to be doing today is to create disruption among the Hindus. It has not the strength to fight Mr. Jinnah and never had.”⁷⁴ Patel was conspicuous in his appeals to the Mahasabha members to merge with Congress. In defending the choice of the aforementioned Dr. Deshmukh as a Congress candidate Patel declared: “If a Hindu Mahasabha member wants to protect the rights of Hindus, my advice to each and every Hindu Mahasabha member is: Join the Congress and give it the

⁷³ S.P. Mookerjee, *Diary*, 100.

⁷⁴ Sarat Chandra Bose, *I Warned My Countrymen: Being the Collected Works 1945-50 of Sarat Chandra Bose*, ed. Sisir K. Bose (Calcutta: Netaji Research Bureau, 1968) 72.

benefit of your intelligence.”⁷⁵ In a subsequent speech, he urged the Mahasabhites not to dissipate their energies in opposing Congress, but rather to align with Congress to fight Pakistan: “My view is that all members of the Hindu Mahasabha should join the Congress.”⁷⁶

These appeals had a palpable effect on both Hindu electors and the Mahasabhites. The collapse of the Mahasabha, however, must be placed in a wider context. The campaigns for the Central Assembly and provincial elections unfolded under conditions of mounting social unrest. The INA trials galvanized nationalist feeling. A strike wave erupted as workers tried to take advantage of the lifting of war-time restrictions on union activity and sought to resist employer demands for post-war retrenchment. Thrice during the election period the popular upsurge came into violent conflict with the *Raj*. In November 1945 and again in early February 1946, the British used the military to suppress demonstrations and strikes in Calcutta. With the mid-February mutiny of the Royal Indian Navy (RIN) rankings in Bombay and Karachi, the military itself became the center of the storm. The Congress attitude to the popular challenge to British rule was ambivalent. Its election propaganda fanned the INA agitation and made much of the INC’s long association with the struggle for independence. But the High Command was increasingly concerned with the threat from the left and containing socio-economic unrest. Through an ever-more strident campaign against the CPI, the High Command sought to reassure big business, other privileged social groups, and India’s colonial rulers that it wanted an orderly transfer of power and

⁷⁵ *People’s War*, 11 November 1945, citing the 1 November 1945 issue of *Nootan Gujarat*, a pro-Congress Gujarati daily.

⁷⁶ As cited in Statement of CP (Marathi) Hindu Election Board 28 November 1945, SPM Papers, II-IV Installment, File 74, Part 2.

socio-economic reform—not social revolution. The emergence of the Congress as a party of order was most graphically demonstrated by its fierce opposition to the RIN mutiny and to the general strike the mutiny provoked in the City of Bombay. G.D. Birla's *Eastern Economist* commended the Congress leaders for having denounced "rebellion, mutiny [and] indiscipline" "whenever they spoke" during India's winter of discontent, adding that if a negotiated transfer of power were not soon accomplished "even the Congress would not be able to check the deluge."⁷⁷

In considering the collapse in Mahasabha support it is important to recognize the confluence of personal ambitions and broader class interests. The Mahasabhite defectors to Congress—*zamindars*, business magnates, and politicians—were in pursuit of the influence and patronage that would come from backing the winning side. But they also gravitated to Congress because they recognized with increasing clarity that the party of Gandhi, Patel and Nehru was the best mechanism for containing and constraining the popular upsurge. For its part, the Congress leadership, welcomed the Mahasabhites as they represented additional right-wing ballast at a time when the leaders of India's premier nationalist organization feared being swamped or swept aside by the leftward current.

The Mahasabha's pursuit of an electoral pact with Congress

A major element in the Mahasabha's disintegration was its fracturing along regional lines. This tendency was exemplified and intensified by the attempt of Mahasabha leaders in three provinces—Bengal, the United Provinces, and the Punjab—to reach their own electoral understandings with Congress.

⁷⁷ *Eastern Economist*, 10 May 1946, as cited in S.K. Ghosh, *India and the Raj*, 269.

As the Mahasabha's crisis grew, Congress opposition toward a formal alliance between the two parties hardened. But in September and early October 1945 many provincial Congress leaders voiced support for an electoral pact with the Mahasabha. Tandon "welcomed the idea in no uncertain terms," for he thought it "essential" that there be a Hindu Mahasabha legislative block "to oppose the Muslim League on those points on which the Congress will have to remain silent."⁷⁸ Nor was the High Command intrinsically opposed. After meeting with Mookerjee, Rajendra Prasad wrote Patel to urge that the Congress strike an all-India electoral alliance with the Mahasabha.⁷⁹ Even J. Nehru, who in the past had condemned the Mahasabha as a tool of feudal reaction, was willing to explore the modalities of a Congress-Mahasabha alliance in repeated discussions with Maheshwar Dayal.⁸⁰ The readiness of the Congress leaders to entertain Mahasabha proposals for an election pact raises crucial questions about the nature of the INC's opposition to Hindu communalism. These will be addressed elsewhere. For now suffice it to say that the Congress leaders declined to jointly contest the elections with the Mahasabha for pragmatic not principled reasons. An alliance was unwarranted, they concluded, because the Mahasabha did not have the strength to otherwise damage the INC's electoral prospects. A pact with the Mahasabha would "compromise" the Congress claims to be secular and an intransigent opponent of the *Raj* "without any compensating advantage."⁸¹

⁷⁸ "Account of meeting of Parliamentary Board of Agra & Oudh at Cawnpore September 23, 1945," SPM II-IV, File 96.

⁷⁹ Patel to Prasad, 8 October 1945, *Patel Correspondence*, 2: 11-12; S.P. Mookerjee to Maheshwar Dayal, 5 October, 1945, SPM II-IV, File 96.

⁸⁰ "Account of meeting of Parliamentary Board of Agra & Oudh at Cawnpore, 23 September, 1945, and Maheshwar Dayal to S.P. Mookerjee, 20 October 1945, SPM II-IV, File 96; J. Nehru to Rajendra Prasad, 9 October 1946, Prasad Correspondence, 6: 28-29.

⁸¹ Patel to Maulana K. Azad, 15 October 1945, *Patel's Correspondence*, 2: 24.

Our focus here will be to show how Mookerjee's courting of the INC exacerbated the Mahasabha's internal crisis, by undermining its independent political identity and prompting defections both by those who continued to perceive the Congress as a threat to the existing social order and those who saw it waging a common struggle with the Mahasabha against Pakistan and Communism.

The Mahasabha Working Committee at its mid-August 1945 meeting had agreed to explore the possibility of an electoral alliance with the Congress. But no sub-committee was ever struck to negotiate with the Congress on an all-India basis. Rather Mookerjee sought an understanding with the Congress in his home province of Bengal.

Mookerjee probably calculated that the Mahasabha was better positioned to strike a deal with Congress in Bengal than at the all-India level. And why not? He was on intimate terms with the leaders of the Bengal Congress. Nowhere was the Mahasabha stronger than in Bengal. The Bengal Mahasabha and the Congress had previously allied in various campaigns in and outside the legislature. Last but not least, the intensity of the communal political struggle in Bengal lent weight and urgency to the call for Hindu unity, especially among the *bhadralok*, who made up the bulk of the electorate. Others Mahasabhites counselled such an approach, believing an electoral pact in Bengal would legitimize their efforts to reach an understanding with the Congress elsewhere.⁸² If "a compromise can be arrived at in Bengal," wrote a leading UP Mahasabhite, "then the Congress will have to consider" an all-India alliance. "In U.P they are naturally neither anxious nor are they afraid of the Hindu Mahasabha. . . . But they are keener still to arrive at some settlement with the Sabha because of Bengal."⁸³

⁸² Bishen Chandra Seth to S.P. Mookerjee, 29 October 1945, SPM II-IV, File 96.

⁸³ Mahant Digvijay Nath, 2 October 1945, SPM II-IV, File 96.

Initially, Mookerjee's strategy appeared to be working. Kiron Shanker Roy, the head of the Bengal Congress Assembly Party, indicated he was in favor of a Hindu Mahasabha-INC alliance, and Sarat Chandra Bose, just days after his release from prison, agreed that the Congress and Mahasabha should stand a joint slate of candidates for the Central Assembly.⁸⁴ It was only when a hitch developed over the number of seats to be allotted to the Mahasabha that Mookerjee sought to involve the Congress High Command, meeting with Rajendra Prasad on October 4 to propose that the Mahasabha and Congress strike an all-India election pact.

The downside of Mookerjee's provincial approach was that it left Mahasabhaites in other provinces free to pursue their own negotiations with Congress. On September 23 Maheshwar Dayal told the Parliamentary Board of the Agra and Oudh Hindu Sabhas that he had spoken with "influential" UP Congressmen about an election pact. In the following weeks he intensified his contacts with Congress, ultimately conversing with all or, almost all, the key UP Congress leaders, including Nehru, Pant, Tandon, and Rafu Ahmad Kidwai, the head of the Congress election campaign in UP.

News of Maheshwar Dayal's activities found its way into the press in late September, but initially his meetings with Congress leaders were construed as preparatory to his admission to the Congress.⁸⁵ There is ample evidence to show that the Congress leadership seriously pondered the Mahasabha offer. Moreover, Maheshwar Dayal and others were keeping Mookerjee apprised of the progress of the UP negotiations. But if the press was wrong in believing Dayal was conferring with Congress leaders about joining their ranks, it was not wholly wrong. Many Congress

⁸⁴ S.P. Mookerjee, *Diary*, 111.

⁸⁵ Bishen Chandra Seth to S.P. Mookerjee, 29 September 1945; Mahant Digvijay Nath to S.P. Mookerjee, 2 October 1945; and Maheshwar Dayal to S.P. Mookerjee, 2 October, 1945, SPM II-IVV, File 96.

leaders favored an electoral pact patterned after the agreement the UP Congress and Malaviya's Congress Nationalist Party had struck for the last provincial elections. In 1937, the Congress had allowed 23 CNPers to stand unopposed in UP in exchange for the CNP's support in all other constituencies and a pledge to abide by Congress discipline on all issues except those pertaining to communal relations.⁸⁶ Moreover, Maheshwar Dayal—no doubt buoyed by the warm reception accorded him by Congress leaders, including Nehru—was contemplating a jump to Congress. In a letter to Mookerjee in early October he denied press claims that he had left the Mahasabha for the Congress, but then added, “with your permission, I do certainly intend doing so.”⁸⁷ Some Mahasabhites became convinced that Maheshwar Dayal was working at the behest of the Congress to spread demoralization and sabotage the Mahasabha election effort from within.⁸⁸ There is a less ignoble explanation. Under the impact of the growing communal and class polarization, Maheshwar Dayal was caught between his old political allegiance and a welling recognition of where his best interests lay. In any event, Dayal's machinations, such as there were, were much more the product than the cause of Mahasabha weakness.

Fearing that Maheshwar Dayal's discussions with the Congress, and in particular the proposal for a CNP-style pact, were cutting across his own efforts to forge an election pact, Mookerjee switched gears and insisted that he alone had the authority to negotiate on the Mahasabha's behalf.⁸⁹ But the Mahasabha President lacked the power to put an end to the parlays Maheshwar Dayal and his cohorts were having with the Congress.

⁸⁶ “Account of Meeting of Parliamentary Board of Agra & Oudh at Cawnpore September 23, 1945” and Bishen Chandra Seth to S.P. Mookerjee, 29 September 1945, SPM II-IV, File 96.

⁸⁷ Maheshwar Dayal to S.P. Mookerjee, 2 October, 1945, SPM II-IV, File 96.

⁸⁸ N.C. Chatterjee to S.P. Mookerjee, undated letter, SPM II-IV, File 68.

⁸⁹ S.P. Mookerjee to Maheshwar Dayal, 5 October, 1945, SPM II-IV, File 96.

Congress-Mahasabha negotiations in UP continued through much of October and were resumed in the interval between the Central Assembly and provincial elections.⁹⁰

In Bengal, the Mahasabhites also clung to the hope of an electoral alliance with the Congress long after it was evident that their prospective partners had lost all interest. Mind you, the Bengal Mahasabhites, could claim to have been jilted at the altar. The ostensible reason for the falling out was a wrangle over how the eight "Hindu" seats allotted Bengal in the Central Assembly were to be divided between the two parties. (Six of the seats were "General." One was designated for landlords; the other for big business.) Depending on whether the corporate constituencies were included in the agreement, the Mahasabha demanded two of six or three of eight seats. Bose insisted the Congress would not cede the Mahasabha more than two of eight or a quarter of the seats. As is frequently the case in such negotiations, the parties made various claims and counter-claims as to who had agreed to what and when.⁹¹ What is incontrovertible is that Sarat Chandra Bose and the Bengal Congress became increasingly resolved to be rid of the Mahasabha. "It occurs to me now that perhaps I went too far," declared Bose in early November. "But I did it to avoid a quarrel amongst ourselves."⁹² Three factors account for the Bengal INC's decision to jettison the Mahasabha. First, the pact stoked factional opposition inside the Bengal Congress. Veterans of the "Official" Congress resented having to curb their ambitions so as to reintegrate Bose and his supporters into the Congress and then again to accommodate the Mahasabha. Although Congress Assembly Party leader Kiron Shanker Roy had frequently aligned with the Mahasabha and prior to Bose's release had accepted the need for an electoral alliance, he now pressed for the

⁹⁰ *UP Intelligence Abstracts*, 11 January 1946, 6.

⁹¹ S.P. Mookerjee, *Diary*, 111-113; Sarat Chandra Bose, *I Warned*, 56-59 and 69-71.

⁹² Sarat Chandra Bose, *I Warned*, 57.

Congress to stand alone.⁹³ Secondly, Mookerjee's attempt to draw the Congress High Command into the negotiations after Bose proved difficult backfired. Albeit for pragmatic reasons, the Congress leadership resolved to oppose a pact even in Bengal, for fear of its consequences on the all-India stage. Finally and most importantly, the Mahasabha's popular support evaporated.

Whilst the Bengali Mahasabhites' attempts to reach an accommodation with Congress took on an increasingly desperate character, the Bengal INC's offer of a quarter of the Central Assembly seats to the Mahasabha cannot be dismissed as a momentary lapse of judgment. Bose's solicitude to the Mahasabha periphery is underscored by the fact that he devoted more than a third of his address to the Bengal INC's maiden election rally to explaining why the negotiations with the Mahasabha had collapsed. Ultimately, Bose and the Congress were able to have their cake and eat it too. Although clearly this was not their original design, by striking a pact with the Mahasabha, then withdrawing from it, the Bengal Congress leaders were able to preserve their secular credentials while demonstrating to the *bhadralok* their readiness to act in defence of "Hindu interests."

In the Punjab, as in Bengal, the rise of the Muslim League greatly alarmed the Hindu minority. Acutely aware of the Mahasabha's political isolation due to its pro-*Raj* proclivities and the deep split between the urban Hindu elite and the Jat *zamindars* of Hariyana, a section of the Punjab Hindu Mahasabha sought an accommodation with Congress. A newly untitled G.C. Narang entered into negotiations with the Congress hoping that he could persuade it to refrain from standing a candidate against him in Ambala Division or even give him a Congress ticket. The outcome of these negotiations, which ultimately involved many of the leading Congressmen and Mahasabhites of the

⁹³ Casey to Wavell, 5 November 1945, *Bengal Documents*, 3: 114.

Punjab, proved quite different from that originally envisaged by Narang. He was the one who withdrew from the contest. Moreover, he issued a statement urging support for the Congress and voicing confidence in its opposition to Pakistan. In return, the foremost Congress leaders in the Punjab—Dr. Gopichand Bhargava, Dewan Chaman Lal, and Maulana Daud Ghaznavi—wrote an open letter to Narang in which they pledged to oppose Pakistan and the Muslim League demand for parity at the Center “vehemently . . . wherever and whenever they are brought up.”⁹⁴

The Punjab Congress leaders claimed they had made no commitments to the Mahasabha, only restated Congress policy.⁹⁵ Brij Lal of the Hindu Election Board saw it differently: “If you make the battle of the Mahasabha the battle of the Congress, what more do we want? Now there is no political difference between the Congress and the Mahasabha.”⁹⁶

Narang’s withdrawal left Mookerjee livid, for it served to crystallize sentiment in Mahasabha circles that opposition to the Congress was futile and that Hindu communal political unity could be forged only through the mass-based Congress. Rebuking Narang, Mookerjee said his actions had “hurt the Hindusabha cause throughout India in a manner which you can not imagine. I have received messages from various parts of India and our friends and supporters are both confused and demoralized.”⁹⁷

The Maharashtran Mahasabhites, not surprisingly, foreswore any electoral pacts with Congress. But their attempt to strike an alliance with the Non-Brahmin party in Berar proved no less disastrous to the Mahasabha election effort. “[A]fter an elaborate

⁹⁴ A.N. Bali, *Now It Can Be Told*, 93.

⁹⁵ Ghopichand Bhargava to Patel, 2 Nov. 1945, *Patel’s Correspondence*, 2: 137-39. See also Patel’s 23 Oct. 1945 appeal to G.C. Narang to withdraw so as avoid a “fratricidal war.” (*Sardar’s Letters*, 7.)

⁹⁶ *People’s War*, 11 November 1945.

⁹⁷ S.P. Mookerjee to G.C. Narang, 9 November 1945, SPM II-IV, File 95, Part 1.

and exhaustive search” the Mahasabhites found a candidate who satisfied their Non-Brahmin allies. Subsequently, however, the non-Brahmin leader, Dr. Panjabrao Deshmukh, reneged on the deal and prevailed on the Mahasabha candidate to withdraw from the contest. Deshmukh’s decapitation of the Mahasabha campaign paved the way for the merger of his Shetkari Sangh with the Congress.⁹⁸

Electoral Collapse and Social Unrest

The Hindu Mahasabha was not the only political formation that the Congress mauled in the 1945-46 elections. The Justice Party of Madras, the Liberals, the Bombay Presidency Non-Brahmin Party and the Scheduled Caste Federation also suffered shattering defeats.⁹⁹ Nonetheless, given its pretensions to be India’s “Third Force” and the advantage that the restricted franchise represented for an organization whose support came overwhelmingly from the privileged, the Mahasabha’s defeat was especially devastating. The Maharashtran Mahasabhite L.B. Bhopatkar was quick to blame the masses for the Central Assembly election results, although only 1 percent of India’s adult population had been entitled to vote. In a letter to Savarkar, he opined, “Democracy thrust on the most ignorant untrained electorate all of a sudden has always proved dangerous to nations and hastened their fall.”¹⁰⁰

While the Maharashtran Mahasabhites took solace in such reactionary musings, Mookerjee responded to the rout of the Mahasabha in the Central Assembly elections by renewing his efforts to forge an alliance with Congress. The Mahasabha President met

⁹⁸ B.G. Khaparde to S.P. Mookerjee, 22 October, 1945, SPM II-IV, File 68; *Hitavada*, 21 and 29 November and 6 December, 1945.

⁹⁹ Ashok Mehta, “Election Patterns: Their Lessons,” *Janata*, 16 June and 7 July, 1946, as reproduced in Ashok Mehta, *The Political Mind of India: An analysis of the results of the General Elections* (Bombay: Socialist Party, 1952) 86.

¹⁰⁰ L.B. Bhopatkar to Savarkar, 7 December 1945, as cited in Andersen, “The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh,” Part 2, 637.

with Patel when the Congress leader visited Calcutta in mid-December, then soon after wrote him a letter proposing an “understanding” between the two organizations. Patel rejected Mookerjee’s proposal, reiterating his previous calls for the Mahasabhites to enter the Congress: “My own view as I have explained it to you is that the Hindu Mahasabha should be dissolved and its members should join the Congress.”¹⁰¹

Mookerjee’s December 1945 proposal for INC-Mahasabha cooperation is of significance because it sheds light on his conception of the Mahasabha and in many ways describes the working relationship that developed between the Congress and the Mahasabha, or at least one wing of it, in 1946-47. Mookerjee urged the Congress to help the Mahasabha in securing representation in the provincial legislatures and any future constitution-making body, so as to allow the Hindu communal cause to be defended without the Congress having to quit the nationalist high-ground. According to Mookerjee, there need “not be any open and declared alliance between the Congress and the Mahasabha.” The Congress could just leave some seats uncontested. Mahasabhite legislators would prove valuable, contended Mookerjee, because they would be free “to speak out without hesitation,” taking stands in defence of the Hindu communal political cause that “the Congress Party may not always find it possible to adopt.”

I genuinely feel that the Congress will find the Mahasabha is a good ally and will have its own position strengthened if there is a Hindu nationalist party working side by side for protection of the legitimate political rights of Hindus without lowering the cause of Indian Unity and Freedom.¹⁰²

The Mahasabha’s freefall continued during the provincial election campaign, which itself was overshadowed by a second spate of street-fighting in Calcutta, the RIN

¹⁰¹ Patel to S.P. Mookerjee, 20 December 1945, *Sardar’s Letters*, 21

¹⁰² S.P. Mookerjee to Patel, 14 December 1945, *Sardar’s Letters*, 19-20.

mutiny, and British Prime Minister Clement Atlee's announcement that he was dispatching to India a three-man Cabinet Mission charged with exploring a new constitutional structure for the subcontinent. British intelligence officers correctly interpreted the Mahasabha Working Committee's mid-December 1945 vow to contest the provincial elections as essentially a pose aimed at averting the organization's collapse.¹⁰³ In the weeks that followed, a raft of prospective Mahasabha candidates found that they were too ill or too overburdened with work to run. Defections to the Congress continued apace. The Raja of Mewa, the new President Maheshwar Dayal had "foisted" on the UP Hindu Mahasabha before officially joining to the Congress, suddenly withdrew from the elections and announced his support for his Congress opponent.¹⁰⁴

When polling was completed the Mahasabha had captured in its own name just 3 of the more 1,500 provincial assembly seats. (A handful of other Mahasabhites or Mahasaba allies, including the Raja of Jagmanpur in UP and the Maharaja of Burdwan in Bengal, won election standing as independents for landlord and other "special interest" seats.) The Mahasabhites elected one member each to the Bombay Presidency and Central Provinces Assemblies. Congress, meanwhile, allowed S.P. Mookerjee to win the Bengal University seat by acclamation.

Although the Hindu-Sikh Nationalist Party had "faded away," the Frontier Hindu Mahasabha managed to muster just one candidate in the 1946 provincial election. Nonetheless, that proved to be more than its counterpart in the Punjab. "The Hindu Sabha as a body did not contest the elections," reported the Punjab Election Commissioner. "There was one Hindu Sabhaite candidate in the Amritsar City (General) Constituency

¹⁰³ *UP Intelligence Abstracts*, 14 December 1945, 198.

¹⁰⁴ Suresh Prakash Singh to N.C. Chatterjee, 25 April 1946, SPM II-IV, File 96.

but he was defeated and lost his security.”¹⁰⁵ In Bengal, the Mahasabha won 78,981 votes or 1.4% of all votes cast.¹⁰⁶ The Sind Mahasabha did somewhat better, capturing 3.2% of the total popular vote or slightly more than 15% of the “Hindu” vote.¹⁰⁷ The Mahasabha’s overall performance was so poor, a correspondent from the Bombay Presidency thought it worth bringing to Mookerjee’s attention that “very few” of the Mahasabha candidates in Maharsashtra had “lost their deposits.”¹⁰⁸ The UP Hindu Mahasabha stood 19 candidates—9 of them in Mahant Digvijaynath’s home Division of Gorakhpur—and polled a miniscule 10,535 votes.¹⁰⁹ So despondent did the Mahasabhites in the UP district of Budaun become, they “were reduced to seeking the help of Muslim Leaguers against Congressmen.”¹¹⁰

As in the fall of 1945, the Mahasabha’s big business and *zamindar* supporters led the rush into Congress. This trend is exemplified by the shift in allegiance of the designated landlord and commerce representatives in the Bengal Assembly. Prior to dissolution, Mahasabhites occupied five of the nine corporate seats. Of these five, four, including the Maharajas of Mymensingh and Coosimbazaar, either won re-election in 1946 as Congressmen or crossed over to become Congress MLAs soon after. Whereas in 1937 the Congress had failed to win a single corporate seat in the Bengal Assembly, after the 1946 elections it held all but one.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ TOP, 6: 1231.

¹⁰⁶ Some 30 million Indians had the right to vote in the provincial elections—ten times more than for the Central Assembly elections, but still only ten percent of the adult population.

¹⁰⁷ Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman*, 161 and 167.

¹⁰⁸ S.L. Karandikar to S.P. Mookerjee, 23 March 1946, SPM II-IV, File 75.

¹⁰⁹ Mahant Digvijaynath to S.P. Mookerjee, 15 March 1946, SPM II-IV, File 75; Reeves, *UP Election Handbook*.

¹¹⁰ *UP Intelligence Abstracts*, 8 March 1946, 38.

¹¹¹ Casey to Wavell, 4 July 1944 and Burrows to Wavell, 21 March 1946, *Bengal Documents*, 3: 21 and 133; J. Chatterjee, *Bengal Divided*, 147.

Maheshwar Dayal, who was both a *taluqdar* and a *seth*, was only the most conspicuous of the many UP landlords and businessmen who passed from the Mahasabha to the Congress. Even the *taluqdar* of Tikra was scandalized by the general desertion of his fellow landlords and titleholders: “[T]he exit of Rajas & Rai Bahadurs . . . [makes] clear that these so-called leaders had joined the organization not for the cause it represents . . . [but for] personal glorification and as a convenient ladder to reach to a certain political status.”¹¹² During the war, the Cawnpore textile mill owner Ram Rattan Gupta had emerged as a prominent figure in the Mahasabha. But in October 1945 he reputedly gave the Congress more than 50,000 rupees and in January 1946 a further 25,000 for election work.¹¹³ In post-independence India, Ram Rattan Gupta would become a Congress legislator and one of the two rival Congress “bosses” of Cawnpore.¹¹⁴ Sir J.P. Srivastava’s path to the Congress would be considerably longer. But he too moved in this period to distance himself from the Mahasabha. A hagiographic account of his life, no doubt published at his behest, explained that while J.P. Srivastava is considered a Hindu Mahasabhite, “The more correct description would be that J.P.S. is an unlabelled patriotic Indian.”¹¹⁵

In the Punjab, among those seeking a Congress nomination or at least Congress electoral backing, were Lala Yodh Raj, a prominent bankroller of the Mahasabha and reputedly the province’s biggest banking magnate, and Mukand Lal Puri a veteran Mahasabhite and Punjab Assemblyman. Puri, whose son-in-law was a leader of the Punjab Congress, placed “his entire” and “not inconsiderable” provincial political

¹¹² Kunwar Suresh Prakash Singh to N.C. Chatterjee, 25 April 1946, SPM II-IV, File 96.

¹¹³ *People’s Age*, 4 November, 1945; Patel to G.V. Pant, 29 January 1946, *Sardar’s Letters*, 46.

¹¹⁴ Ram Rattan Gupta’s Congress career is discussed at length in Paul Brass, *Factional Politics in an Indian State: The Congress in Uttar Pradesh* (Berkeley: U. of California, 1965) Chapter 8.

¹¹⁵ E.V.S. Maniam, *Landmarks in the Life of Sir J.P. Srivastava* (Bombay: Pratt and Co. [1945?]) 43.

network at "the disposal of the Congress." Patel welcomed Puri's support and urged the fractious Punjab Congress leadership to learn from it: "This is the real spirit which is needed in the Punjab."¹¹⁶

Mookerjee's and Savarkar's personal health mirrored the Mahasabha's fortunes. Within a few weeks of each other, the Mahasabha's two best known leaders suffered heart attacks in late 1945 and early 1946.

This chapter has argued that the Mahasabha was caught in the vortex of communal and class polarization. The events surrounding the physical collapse of Mahasabha President Shyma Prasad Mookerjee underscore this. On the evening of 21 November 1945, Mookerjee, who was already physically and emotionally drained by his frantic efforts to prevent the collapse of the Mahasabha election campaign, learned police had opened fire on a student demonstration in downtown Calcutta. To the authorities' dismay, the crowd had not dispersed, despite the killing of at least one student, and was threatening to press on toward the seat of government. Fearing further bloodshed could ignite a social explosion, Mookerjee rushed to the barricades and over the next three days worked with the Governor and other *Raj* officials to defuse the situation, while simultaneously trying to identify the Mahasabha with the escalating anti-British movement. Ultimately, order would be restored only after the Governor, with the acquiescence of Calcutta's Mahasabha mayor, deployed the military, and security forces repeatedly fired on anti-*Raj* protestors.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Brij Lal to S.P. Mookerjee, 9 November 1945, SPM II-IV, File 95, Part 2; Patel to Maulana K. Azad, 24 November 1946, *Patel Works*, 10: 142; Patel to Bhim Sen Sachar, 9 February 1946 and citation from Bhimsen Sachar to Patel, 5 Feb. 1946, *Sardar's Letters*, 61 and note on 61; *People's War*, 11 November, 1945; *People's Age*, 9 December 1945.

¹¹⁷ S.P. Mookerjee, *Diary*, 133-136; *People's Age*, 2 and 9 December 1945; Casey to Wavell, 2 January 1946, *Bengal Documents*, 3: 123; S.K. Ghose, *India and the Raj*, Vol. 2, 264-65.

Adding to Mookerjee's vexation was the attitude of Sarat Chandra Bose. On the first day of the upheaval, the most popular Bengal Congress leader refused to personally intervene, choosing instead to send a short note instructing the students to go home. The note was shredded by the students. The next day Calcutta was paralyzed by a general strike and Mookerjee again found himself trying to mediate between police and demonstrators, only now the crowd had swelled to over a hundred thousand. Even as Mookerjee was atop a police lorry arguing with the Police Commissioner to let the procession continue, the crowd surged forward and broke through the security cordon. Later on the 22nd, more than two hundred thousand participated in a funeral procession honoring the first student killed by police the previous day. Mookerjee, who had arranged for the body to be released to the family, intended to march only briefly behind the funeral bier. But he learned that violent clashes had erupted between the populace of South Calcutta and security forces after a military truck had run over a boy. Fearing the violence would spread, he continued to march.¹¹⁸ "Because of this I had to proceed on foot. . . . As we neared the Calcutta Club, I saw fires blazing in the distance and heard that lorries were being burnt. I diverted the procession through Harish Mukherjee Road."¹¹⁹

"I realized," wrote Mookerjee in his *Diary*, "that a revolution was brewing. . . . There was an air of rebellion all around."¹²⁰ The Governor was of a like mind. Reporting to the Viceroy on the Calcutta events, he declared, "[T]here is a spirit of lawlessness abroad which, as in 1942, can, on a slight and sudden cause, be worked up with

¹¹⁸ S.P. Mookerjee, *Diary*, 134-142; *People's Age*, 2 December 1945.

¹¹⁹ S.P. Mookerjee, *Diary*, 142.

¹²⁰ S.P. Mookerjee, *Diary*, 142-43.

remarkable speed to produce over a wide area simultaneously, manifestations paralyzing to the life of the community.”¹²¹

On November 23rd Mookerjee resumed election campaigning, although “there was tension in the air” and car travel “was hazardous,” because of the general strike and continuing clashes between police and protestors. “We were stopped at several points but were allowed to proceed on being recognized.” Mookerjee spent the day stumping for votes and appealing for Indians to place their faith in the ability of the Mahasabha, Congress and other recognized parties to arrive at a constitutional settlement with the British. Then, as he was travelling to the final rally of the day, Mookerjee collapsed in excruciating pain.¹²²

The circumstances surrounding Savarkar’s medical crisis were less dramatic, but even his overly sympathetic biographer draws the connection between Savarkar’s physical collapse and the Mahasabha’s fate at the polls: “This colossal rout accelerated the deterioration in the health of Savarkar so much that in a telegram sent to N.C. Chatterji he bewailed. ‘My nerve system has been literally shattered for the two years. It has now collapsed’.” A few weeks later, despite his having been removed to the home of Gulabchand Hirachand, a leading industrialist, who provided for expert medical care, Savarkar suffered a massive heart attack.¹²³

Mookerjee sought to transform the Mahasabha into a mass-based protagonist of Hindu communal-political interests that would act as a brake on the Congress. Ironically, 1945—Mookerjee’s only full year as Mahasabha President—spelt the failure of his and Savarkar’s respective orientations. At the Simla Conference the Mahasabha was

¹²¹ Casey to Wavell, 2 January 1946, *Bengal Documents*, 3: 123.

¹²² S.P. Mookerjee, *Diary*, 143-144.

¹²³ Keer, 371.

unceremoniously dropped as a British ally and client despite its war-time support for the *Raj*. Mookerjee's attempts to reposition the Mahasabha, as demonstrated by the titles dispute and the negotiations with Congress over an electoral pact, only served to further destabilize it. During the 1945-46 elections, the Mahasabha functioned under a double handicap. They had been deprived of British support, yet continued to bear the stigma of *Raj* collaborators. That the British decision to de-legitimize the Mahasabha so deflated it, points to the Mahasabha's dependence on *Raj* patronage and its narrow social base.

The elections shattered any remaining pretensions the Mahasabha had of being a major player in all-India politics. Yet it did enjoy a 16-month resurgence, from October 1946 through January 1948, as a result of the charged communal atmosphere and mass violence that accompanied the partition of British India. In January 1948, the Mahasabha for the first and only time would find itself at the head of mass anti-Congress demonstrations. The paradox of the Mahasabha's political demise, as the next two chapters illustrate, is that it was both bang and whimper.

Chapter 7: The Hindu Mahasabha and India's new political order, Part One—Communal Fury, Partition, and the Radicalization of the Mahasabha

For most of 1946, the All-India Hindu Mahasabha was in disarray. Its claim to represent India's Hindus had been decisively refuted by the results of the 1945-46 elections. So low had the Mahasabha's stock fallen that the Cabinet Mission sent by London in the spring of 1946 to negotiate a staggered transfer of power initially refused the Mahasabha an audience.¹

Demoralized and hobbled by ill health, Shyama Prasad Mookerjee was undecided where his future lay. After stepping aside for several months at his doctors' insistence, Mookerjee returned to the Mahasabha Presidency in April 1946. Almost simultaneously he sold the Mahasabha's share in *The Nationalist*, a Calcutta daily he had co-founded only two years before to promote the Mahasabha viewpoint.² In the summer of 1946, he conditionally accepted the Vice-Chancellorship of Benares Hindu University.³ But after relinquishing the Mahasabha presidency for good in September 1946⁴, Mookerjee neither retired from politics nor quit the Mahasabha. Rather he threw himself into organizing a Hindusthan National Guard, a vigilante force charged with "defending" Bengal's Hindus.

The void in the Mahasabha's central leadership was filled by two of Tilak's former comrades, both of them over 65. No one could question the commitment of Moonje or L.B. Bhopatkar to the Mahasabha. Nevertheless, their emergence at the

¹ SPM II-IV, File 75.

² Casey to Wavell, 13 November 1944, *Bengal Documents*, V. 3, 53; *People's Age* 28 April, 1946.

³ Sarvepalli Gopal, *Radhakrishnan: A Biography* (London: Unwin, 1989) 202; Patel to G.B. Pant, 1 August 1947, *Pant Works*, V. 11, 481. "General-Secretary's Report on Hindu Mahasabha Work Jan./45-Dec. 46", HMS C-89.

⁴ "General-Secretary's Report on Hindu Mahasabha Work Jan./45-Dec. 46," HMS C-89.

Mahasabha's helm at this critical juncture was both symptomatic and symbolic of its estrangement from contemporary India.

The Mahasabha's collapse notwithstanding, the Congress leadership remained solicitous toward Hindu communal political opinion. In July 1946 Mookerjee and the only other member of his Hindu Nationalist faction in the Bengal Assembly, the Maharaja of Burdwan, were elected to the Constituent Assembly on the Congress ticket.⁵ The Congress also sent to the Constituent Assembly two of Mookerjee's former Mahasabha colleagues, Maheshwar Dayal and Mehr Chand Khanna, and several Mahasabha leaders from the pre-Savarkar period, including M.R. Jayakar and the Bihari Congressman Jagat Narain Lal.⁶

The eruption of mass communal violence in the latter half of 1946 re-animated the Mahasabhites. According to the author of the Mahasabha's official history, "The great Calcutta killings, the gruesome happenings at Noakhali, the Bihar riots, and the firing on the Hindus by the Congress Government . . . brought to the surface the dormant forces of Hindutva."⁷

The revived Mahasabha was even more communally virulent. In public *fora* leading Mahasabhites called for the expulsion and extermination of India's Muslims. Intensifying communal strife and the social anxiety produced by the impending departure of India's colonial overlords were the principal factors in the Mahasabha's "radicalization." But a change in the composition of its leadership, particularly at the local level, also contributed. With the withdrawal of many *taluqdars* and other titled and

⁵ Burrows to Wavell 18 July and 21 August, 1946, *Bengal Documents*, 3: 157 and 171.

⁶ *IAR*, II, 1946 : 317-325.

⁷ Indra Prakash, *Bhoptakar*, 85.

conservative elite elements, power within the Mahasabha had accrued to the Hindu nationalist ideologues.

This chapter and the succeeding one will trace the evolution of the Hindu Mahasabha from its resurgence in the fall of 1946 through the 1951-52 elections, when it was eclipsed by the Jana Sangh, a rival Hindu nationalist party founded and led by S.P. Mookerjee. Our principal focus will be on the eighteen months from the Calcutta communal convulsion of mid-August 1946 through the assassination of M.K. Gandhi. The importance of this period is evident, yet historians have only begun to tease out its complexities.

In respect to the Mahasabha, the challenge is to illuminate how in 1947 it came to be allied with the Congress—in implementing the communal partition of Bengal and the Punjab—even as it strove to mobilize opposition to the emerging Congress-led political order. Official India and Indian nationalist historiography have elided the Mahasabha-Congress alliance. But it found formal expression in Mookerjee's appointment to the post of Industry Minister in India's post-independence government. Moreover, Vallabhbhai Patel, the Home Minister and leader of the Congress right, hoped to make it permanent by subsuming the Mahasabha and the RSS in the Congress. Examples of the Mahasabha's opposition to India's emerging political order abound, from its support for Travancore's abortive secession bid and its boycott of the 15 August 1947 independence celebrations to its "direct action" movement against the UP Congress Ministry and its campaign for India to be proclaimed a Hindu state.

This and the succeeding chapter will show that the tumult of 1947 simultaneously raised Mookerjee's and Savarkar's rival visions of the Mahasabha—as

Hindu communalist ally of the Congress and spearhead of a rightist challenge to the Congress and its bourgeois reform program—onto the political horizon. Only their appearance proved as fleeting as a mirage. The 30 January 1948 assassination of M.K. Gandhi brought an abrupt end to the Congress-Mahasabha alliance. And its aftermath revealed how deluded the Mahasabhites were in believing that the partition refugees' resentment of Congress rule was representative of the mood of India as a whole.

The Mahasabha publicly disclaimed any role in, or responsibility for, Gandhi's assassination. But Chapter Eight will show that many in the Mahasabha leadership sympathized with the assassins. Moreover, the Mahasabha's promotion of communal violence and increasingly hysterical anti-Congress and anti-Gandhi rhetoric contributed to the political climate that made the assassination possible. Claims that the Mashabasha was part of a broader plot to overthrow independent India's Congress-led government will also be briefly considered.

Our discussion of the 1946-52 period will demonstrate that the dominant faction within the Mahasabha was only grudgingly reconciled to key elements of India's new political order, including the liquidation of the Princely States, the abolition of the *zamindari* system and the adoption of a secular constitution. The principal reason for the Mahasabhites' ultimate submission was their own manifest political weakness. Recognizing that the Mahasabha was a spent force, Mookerjee resigned from it in November 1948. Chapter Eight concludes with a discussion of the last attempt to revive the Mahasabha as the right-wing alternative to the Congress and Congress nationalism and its collapse as a result of the Mahasabha's crushing defeat in India's first post-independence general election.

I: Mass Communal Violence and the Mahasabha's Resurgence

Between mid-August and mid-November 1946, India was thrice shaken by eruptions of mass communal violence. Indians of all social classes, political persuasions, and religious faiths were horrified by the carnage. Their responses varied, however. Whilst Gandhi and Nehru condemned the Hindu villagers of Bihar for turning on their Muslim brethren, the Mahasabhites proclaimed them "heroes."⁸

Recent scholarship has alerted us to the social complexities that lie behind mass communal violence, as well as to the danger of essentializing the participants.⁹ The following discussion of the successive bouts of communal bloodletting in Calcutta, south-east Bengal, and Bihar makes no claim to provide their definitive explanation. Only brief mention has been made of the precarious economic conjuncture and of the social structure that underlay much of the sense of communal grievance. Our aim, based on a review of contemporary and scholarly literature, is simply to establish that Hindu Mahasabhites played a significant role in these events, both as instigators and victims, and to illuminate the connection between the eruption of mass communal violence in the second half of 1946 and the Mahasabha's political resurgence.

The Great Calcutta Killing of 16-19 August 1946 is seen as a watershed. Some have even argued it made partition inevitable. The violence occasioned by the Muslim League's first-ever Direct Action campaign was of a scale and intensity hitherto unseen in British India, with an estimated four-day death toll of between 5,000 and 10,000.

⁸ Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi—The Last Phase*, Vol. 1, 278; *Selected Works of J. Nehru, Second Series*, V. 1, 70-91. According to a report in the 14 January 1947 *Hindu Outlook* the presidential procession at the Mahasabha's Gorakhpur Session resounded with the slogans, "Long live Bihar Revolution" and "Be heroes like Biharis."

⁹ Eg. Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, 504.

At the end of July, Jinnah had called on Muslims to make August 16 All-India Direct Action Day so as to thwart an alleged Congress plot to renege, with tacit British support, on the Cabinet Mission's plan to divide India into three zones loosely tied together in a federation. The anxiety of League leaders and supporters was heightened when, on August 10, the Congress Working Committee accepted the Viceroy's invitation to form an interim government with or without League support.¹⁰

Outside Calcutta, Direct Action Day passed off without incident. There is no evidence to show that Jinnah and other senior All-India League leaders explicitly called for violence. Nor, however, did they spell out what they meant by Direct Action, except to say that the League would no longer be bound by constitutional methods. At the very least, their repeated avowals that the League did not subscribe to the Congress doctrine of non-violence and repeated warnings that the formation of a Congress-led interim government was a provocation that would result in bloodshed were meant to intimidate and frighten Hindus.¹¹

Bengal's Muslim League Premier and Home Minister, H.S. Suhrawardy, later conceded he bore responsibility for the Calcutta violence, but failed to provide any specifics as to why.¹² Evidence suggests his were sins of both omission and commission. The Bengal administration Suhrawardy headed did little to stop the violence. The Army Commander whose troops ultimately were deployed across India's largest urban center claimed not "one member of that Government" gave "me any real assistance in bringing order out of disorder." Through his leadership of the white-flag or anti-communist

¹⁰ A.I. Singh, 174-180.

¹¹ A.I. Singh, 181-183.

¹² Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi—The Last Phase*, V. II, 369.

unions, Suhrawardy is reputed to have developed close connections to the Calcutta underworld, meaning he was well-positioned to mobilize Muslim *goonda* support.¹³

Suhrawardy's perfidy became a convenient means for the rival parties of the Bengali *bhadralok*, the Mahasabha and the Congress, to obscure the fact that during the Great Calcutta Killing there were widespread, indiscriminate attacks on Muslims and their businesses and dwellings.¹⁴ In effect, if Suhrawardy and elements in the Bengal League initiated the challenge, other groups, some explicitly organized on Hindu communal lines and others merely predominantly Hindu in composition, were quick to take it up. In private correspondence Vallabhbhai Patel expressed some satisfaction that Hindus got "the best" of the Calcutta clashes, a reference to the fact that the majority of the dead and injured were Muslims.¹⁵

Both the Mahasabha and the Congress urged Hindus to actively defy the League's August 16 *hartal*. A Mahasabha pamphlet, *16th August Beware*, argued that anything short of public defiance of the League would constitute capitulation to Pakistan.¹⁶ By 7:30 AM on the 16th, army authorities were receiving reports that Hindus had erected barricades on two bridges in order to prevent Muslims from reaching the city center where Suhrawardy was to address a rally in the afternoon.¹⁷ Later that morning, Hindus began to launch retaliatory attacks on Muslims.¹⁸ The campaign for Hindus to actively resist the League *hartal* and the rapidity of the reply to the first Muslim communal attacks attest to advanced planning for communal violence by elements within

¹³ General Roy Bucher as cited in A.I. Singh, 187; H.V. Hodson, *The Great Divide: Britain-India-Pakistan* (London, Hutchinson, 1969) 166-67 and A.I. Singh 184-187.

¹⁴ J. Chatterjee, *Bengal Divided*, 233 and 239; Suranjan Das, 186.

¹⁵ J. Chatterjee, *Bengal Divided*, 233; A.I. Singh, 183 and 187.

¹⁶ Suranjan Das, 169.

¹⁷ Francis Toker, *While Memory Serves* (London: Cassell and Co., 1950) 157.

¹⁸ Burrows to Wavell, 22 August 1946, *TOP*, 8: 296.

Calcutta's Hindu majority. Indeed, in the weeks prior to the Calcutta outbreak, reports the then head of the British Indian Army's Eastern Command, the Hindu Mashasabha "was actively encouraging Hindus to prepare secretly, against any future communal trouble. All, even the *goondas*, were to be trained in staff and dagger play—as though *goondas* needed training!"¹⁹ Lieutenant-General Sir Francis Taker is not an unbiased witness, but during the same period Moonje wrote to Patel to impress upon him the need to "train Hindus in the art of stabbing."²⁰

The Mahasabha placed special emphasis on securing the support of decommissioned British Indian Army personnel and ex-soldiers in Subhas Chandra Bose's Indian National Army.²¹ In addition to having several volunteer organizations of its own, notably the Bharat Sevashram Sangha and the Hindu Sakhti Sangha, the Bengal Mahasabhites had strong ties to the Hindu *akhara* movement and to the section of the former Bengali terrorist movement (especially members of the Anushilan and Jugantar groups) that had not gone over to the CPI.²² In 1942, when elements within the Bengal Hindu Sabha were considering joining the Quit India movement, N.C. Chatterjee and other leading Mahasabhites met with representatives of "various physical culture clubs" of Bengal, including the ex-Jugantar terrorist and convict Pulin Das, and agreed that they should work to unite "all Hindu volunteer organizations as early as possible."²³ Chatterjee would later boast of the role the Hindu Mahasabha played during the Calcutta riots: "When the streets of Calcutta ran red with blood, it is the much-abused Hindu

¹⁹ Francis Taker, *While Memory Serves* (London: Cassel, 1950) 143.

²⁰ B.S. Moonje to Vallabhbhai Patel, 12 July 1946, B.S. Moonje Papers, File 66.

²¹ J. Chatterjee, *Bengal Divided*, 237-38.

²² J. Chatterjee, *Bengal Divided*, 233-240.

²³ D.A. Braydon, Central Intelligence Officer, "Hindu Mahasabha and Congress Movement," 5 August 1942, R/3/2/33 IOL; J. Chatterjee, *Bengal Divided*, 233 and 235.

Mahasabha and the volunteer organization[s] that tried their best to rescue the city from the continued depredations of the communal hooligans.”²⁴

Seven weeks after the Calcutta events, a systematic campaign of looting, rape, murder, and forced conversions to Islam was launched against Hindus in the south-east Bengal district of Noakhali. Ultimately, the violence affected some 350 villages in Noakhali and the adjoining district of Tippera between October 10 and 20, 1946.²⁵ The communal conflagration cannot be separated from mounting fears of a new famine. By early October rice supplies in east Bengal had fallen to “critical” levels, with Noakhali and Tippera the “worst affected” districts.²⁶ Nevertheless, the communal convulsion in Noakhali had an identifiable instigator and organizer—a *pir*, *zamindar*, and former Jamiat member of the Bengal Legislative Assembly by the name of Ghulam Sarwar. Having defected to the League after the Calcutta riots, Sarwar gathered a group of some 1,000 men, many of them from outside the district, who in the name of Pakistan set about terrorizing Noakhali’s Hindu population.²⁷ The Noakhali violence never became a general rising of the Muslim population.²⁸ According to the District Magistrate, “It is not exactly a communal trouble. It is mainly hooligans who have, of course, directed their activities primarily against the Hindus; in some instances attacks on Muslims have been reported.”²⁹ That said, Sarwar and his supporters did appeal to popular grievances against the big *zamindars*, money-lenders and traders—even Bengal’s Governor recognized that

²⁴ N.C. Chatterjee, *The Hooghly Sardar Subdivisional Conference 11 January 1948 Presidential Address* by S.J. N.C. Chatterjee, 2.

²⁵ Suranjan Das, 193.

²⁶ Sugata Bose, *Agrarian Bengal: Economy, Social Structure and Politics, 1919-1947* (Cambridge: CUP, 1986).

²⁷ *People’s Age*, 27 October 1946; Tucker, 174-75; and Suranjan Das, 192, 195-96, 199, and 201.

²⁸ Sugata Bose, who makes only one cursory mention of Ghulam Sarwar’s role in the Noakhali events, has a different view. See 225.

²⁹ Cited in, Sugata Bose, 226.

many of Noakhali's predominantly Hindu "shopkeepers made fortunes" during the 1943 famine—and won active support from sections of the impoverished Muslim peasantry.³⁰ According to a contemporary report, the violence in Tippera was initiated by persons crossing over from Noakhali, but almost "invariably" Tippera's riotous crowds were made up of "the inhabitants of the village [that had been] attacked or neighbouring villages."³¹

The mass violence in Noakhali began with an attack on the two wealthiest Hindus in the Ramganj police area, one of who, not surprisingly given the nature of the Mahasabha, was the President of the District Hindu Sabha. Before Rajendra Lal Roy Chaudhuri and his family succumbed, he fought bravely or so claimed the Mahasabha, which proclaimed him a Hindu martyr.³² As in Calcutta two months earlier, Noakhali witnessed many unspeakable outrages aimed at inflicting the maximum humiliation and suffering. British officials observed, however, that the Mahasabhite politicians and many of their Congress counterparts sought to incite their followers by grossly inflating the Hindu death toll and providing lurid descriptions of both real and imagined atrocities. Whereas the dead numbered in the hundreds—300 is an oft-cited figure—Mahasabha leaders spoke of thousands, even tens of thousands, of Hindu fatalities.³³ Furthermore, they presented the violence in Noakhali and Tippera as a general Muslim assault on the Hindu population, pointing to Sarwar's role only from the standpoint of demonstrating League complicity. In keeping with this rigidly communalist reading of the Noakhali

³⁰ Burrows to Colville, 16 December 1946, *Bengal Documents*, 3: 181; Suranjan Das, 201.

³¹ Burrows to Wavell, 8 November 1946 as cited in Suranjan Das, 201.

³² *Short Report of Hindu Mahasabha Relief Activities During "Calcutta Killing" and "Noakhali Carnage"* (Calcutta: Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha, c. 1946.)

³³ Tukur 174-176, 193 and 203. "Thousands killed in Noakhali" screamed a *Mahratta* headline, 8 November 1946.

events, Mookerjee raised, albeit only implicitly, the threat of retaliation. The Congress Ministers in India's interim government, said Mookerjee, "should warn the Bengal Ministry that they are playing a mad and dangerous game in Bengal, which may exasperate people in other provinces."³⁴

According to the *Raj*'s intelligence network, the Hindu Mahasabha sprang back to life with the agitation it mounted over the atrocities inflicted on Noakhali's Hindus. In the last week of October the Mahasabha held meetings, processions, and *hartals* in 18 UP districts.³⁵ "The most striking feature of the communal situation in this Province during the last few weeks," reported the UP Criminal Investigation Division (CID), "has been the emergence of orthodox Hinduism as a potent factor.

The Hindu Mahasabha, which had very little following or political influence, and the Arya Samaj, which remained in the background as a purely religious body, have come into the open, and are rallying Hindus all over the country to fight Islam. At their meetings speakers have also been critical of the Congress for their support of Nationalist Muslims and the failure of the Congress Interim Government . . . to protect Hindus in East Bengal.³⁶

The report's prediction of "communal anarchy unless very strong and immediate action is taken" was quickly and tragically borne out. The first week of November saw the "most serious [communal] rioting" in UP in years.³⁷

Only the UP violence was overshadowed by the anti-Muslim pogrom that convulsed much of Bihar from October 31 through November 6, 1946. This communal

³⁴ *People's Age*, 27 October 1946.

³⁵ *UP Intelligence Abstracts*, 25 October and 1 November, 1946.

³⁶ Enclosure in Wavell to Pethick-Lawrence, 22 November 1946, *TOP*, 9: 144.

³⁷ *Ibid.* and *UP Intelligence Abstracts*, 8 November, 1946.

outburst was over a much wider area than that which shook south-east Bengal and exacted a far bigger death toll, 15 to 25 times larger.³⁸

As in the UP, the Noakhali agitation served as the catalyst for the Bihar eruption. The first communal disturbances took place on October 26 during “Noakhali Day” activities. The Mahasabha was by no means alone in organizing actions with the ostensible purpose of expressing solidarity with the Hindus of south-eastern Bengal and raising funds to help the 40,000 to 50,000 who had fled their homes. Arya Samajists, some Congressmen—including the former Hindu Mahasabhaite Jagat Narain Lal—Marwari traders and industrialists, and sections of Bihar’s landed elite all played prominent roles. The *Searchlight* declared in its October 23 issue, “East Bengal is a challenge to India’s manhood. . . . If there must be a civil war, let there be one.” The other Patna daily, the Maharaja of Darbhanga’s *Indian Nation*, was even more “virulent and direct in its incitements against the Moslems.” The Viceroy accused it of functioning virtually as “an organ of the Mahasabha.”³⁹

Lieutenant-General Francis Tuker, the then head of the British Indian Army’s Eastern Command, reports that there were rumors Marwari traders from Calcutta plotted and financed the Bihar violence to exact revenge for the losses they had suffered during the Great Killing. (Migrant workers from Bihar had been prominent among the Muslim mobs.) “My own belief,” Tuker adds, “is that the Hindu Mahasabha was the brain behind this devilry.”⁴⁰ Others with a more sophisticated understanding of India’s social and communal dynamics drew the connection between the Mahasabha’s Noakhali agitation

³⁸ Vinita Damodaran, *Broken Promises: Popular Protest, Indian Nationalism and the Congress Party in Bihar, 1935-1946* (Delhi: OUP, 1992) 337-346.

³⁹ Wavell to Pethick-Lawrence, 23 November 1946, *TOP*, 9: 150-51.

⁴⁰ Tuker, 182.

and the threatened position of Bihar's landlords. In response to pending provincial Congress legislation abolishing *zamindari* tenure, the landlords had begun expelling large numbers of their tenants so as to increase the *baksht* or *zirat* (demesne) portion of their estates. The peasantry, with assistance from the Congress Socialists and M.N. Roy's Radical Democrats, responded with a widening agitation, refusing to perform *begar* or forced labor, ploughing disputed lands, and stealing the crops and cattle of *zamindars*. Increasingly, the landlords retaliated with outright violence, often with the collusion of the local police. Jawaharlal Nehru, Gandhi's secretary, Pyarelal, and the Congress Socialist Ramnadas Misra, among others, argued that the Hindu landowners used the Hindu Mahasabha and the Noakhali agitation to reassert their traditional role as community leaders and redirect the peasant unrest away from a challenge to the agrarian social order and into communal bloodletting.⁴¹

No propaganda can flourish without an organization as its focal point. The Zamindar Association was there but it was not enough. So they took hold of the Hindu Mahasabha.

... Pamphlets began to pour in telling people that those who were behind abolition of landlordism wanted really to finish the Hindu religion.⁴²

Vinita Damodran has shown that the Bihar districts where the agrarian unrest was greatest and support for the *Kisan Sabha* movement the strongest were precisely those most affected by the communal violence in November 1946. At the same time, she correctly cautions that neither this correlation, nor evidence of landlord incitement,

⁴¹ Damodaran, 322-337; Pyarelal, *Mahatma Gandhi—The Last Phase*, V. 1, 271; J. Nehru, "Note on Recent Events and Disturbances in Bihar," *Selected Works of J. Nehru*, Second Series, V. 1, 70-78.

⁴² Ramnadas Misra, "The Socialists and the Communal Problem," *Janata* clipping undated, Ramnadas Misra Papers, NMML, File S-38. Tony Cox drew my attention to the Misra article.

explains the mass character of the anti-Muslim pogrom or why Hindu peasants who had been engaged in joint struggles with Muslim tillers suddenly turned on them.⁴³

Moonje who toured Bihar for two weeks beginning in mid-November 1946 rejected the charge that the Mahasabha had been at the root of the communal violence. It was far too weak, he insisted, to have played such a role. Moonje's credibility as a witness is demonstrated by his assertion that he found not "one single incident where the Hindus took the initiative in committing aggressions on their Musalman neighbours."⁴⁴ Moonje had no qualms about endorsing anti-Muslim violence. He told the Bihar Hindus, "They are fools who say that you have deformed Hindu religion. I congratulate you, for your chivalry. You have buried the Satan of Pakistan in Bihar and saved the glorious name of Hindu religion."⁴⁵ Nevertheless, there is an element of truth in Moonje's denials. As an organization, the Mahasabha in late 1946 lacked the cohesion and popular support to have orchestrated the Bihar disturbances.

But if elite manipulation and the confluence of Hindu communalist agitation and landlord self-interest do not fully account for the communal disturbances that convulsed Bihar in the fall of 1946, it is no less incontestable that with their cries of Hinduism in danger and exhortations to avenge the Noakhali Hindus, the Mahasabha and its landlord supporters played a pivotal role in fomenting the Bihar pogrom. Moreover, as we shall see, this was not the last time that the landlords or at least a section of them tried to breathe life into the Mahasabha.

⁴³ Damodaran, especially 345-46 and 352-53.

⁴⁴ Statement of B.S. Moonje and Kumar Ganganand Sinha in Balshastri Hardas, *What I Saw in Bihar*, (Nagpur: Rashtradharm Prasarak Granthamala, c. 1947) 21 and 30.

⁴⁵ Balshastri Hardas, *What I Saw in Bihar*, (Nagpur: Rashtradharm Prasarak Granthamala, c. 1947) 18-19.

In the aftermath of the Bihar violence the Mahasabha mounted a campaign to defend the Bihar Hindus from "Congress repression," thus further enflaming the communal situation. Mahasabha President Bhopatkar, Mookerjee, and Kumar Gangand Sinha, the veteran Bihari Mahasabhite and political protégé of the Maharaja of Darbhanga, sponsored a Bihar Hindu Relief and Protection Board that was charged with providing legal defence and support for the families of Hindus detained for their alleged involvement in attacks on Muslims. Ultimately, this campaign culminated in an unsuccessful direct action movement against Bihar's Congress Ministry.⁴⁶

The mass communal violence in the latter half of 1946 served to re-animate the Mahasabha cadre and led many who had drifted toward the Congress or into political inactivity to revive their Mahasabha ties. M.R. Jayakar, who had been estranged by the Maharashtra Mahasabhites' exaltation of Savarkar, resumed donations.⁴⁷ According to the UP CID, the Mahasabha's all-India session in Gorakhpur in late December 1946 was "an unqualified success" with 7,000 registered delegates and rallies of 40,000 to 60,000.⁴⁸ "On the dias," gushed *Hindu Outlook* ". . . was the shining galaxy of the United Provinces landed aristocracy."⁴⁹

Mookerjee had always insisted that a fundamental difference between the Mahasabha and the Congress was the Mahasabha's opposition to Gandhi's doctrine of non-violence or *ahimsa*. Now he took personal charge of the creation of a Bengal Hindu militia, launching a Hindusthan National Guard, as a counterpoint to the League's Muslim National Guard, in October 1946.

⁴⁶ Statement of Bhopatkar dated 14 February 1947; Kumar Ganganand Sinha "An Appeal for the defence and protection of the Hindus in Behar," HMS M-17.

⁴⁷ M.R. Jayakar to A.H. Gadre, 5 November 1946, Jayakar Papers, Microfilm Roll 155, U of T.

⁴⁸ *UP Intelligence Abstracts*, 27 December 1946.

⁴⁹ *Hindu Outlook*, 14 January 1947.

L.B. Bhopatkar, who was soon to be elected the Mahasabha's President, welcomed the Bengal initiative in terms that made clear he believed the Guard's task went far beyond repelling attacks on Hindus during communal rioting: "The Hindus must, nolen volens, convince the Muslims to their cost that terrorism is a game which the Hindus can play at more effectively than even the Muslims, and can hardly result in the achievement of their political goal ..."⁵⁰ In his address to the Mahasabha's Gorakhpur session, Bhopatkar answered Gandhi's criticisms of the Bihar Hindus by affirming the divinity of retaliation and revenge: Henceforth, he proclaimed, the mantra of the Hindus must be, "While it is human to forget and forgive, it is divine to resist and repay."⁵¹ The session voted to make the Hindusthan National Guard an all-India organization.⁵²

V.G. Deshpande, in his presidential address to a conference of the All-India Hindu Students Federation held in conjunction with the Gorakhpur session, was even more forthright in calling for mass violence against Muslims. He hailed the Hindus of Bihar for exhibiting a "Pan-Hindu feeling" that transcended "the barriers of provincialism" and showing "the way of Hindu salvation," then proclaimed "war on Islam . . . the remedy" to the Hindus' plight.

There is nothing fanatic or intolerant in the declaration of such a war. . . . If it is not intolerance to fight an anti-fascist war, if it is not fanaticism to declare the Shinto religion of Japan as unlawful, I do not understand why it should be regarded as fanatic to declare war on Islam which is responsible for manslaughter, arson, loot [*sic*], crimes against women, forcible conversion and other gruesome acts on an infinitely larger scale than those of either fascism or Shintoism.

In India it should be made unlawful to profess Islamic religion. . . . [I]f the Muslims do not accept this proposition they are free to migrate to

⁵⁰ L.B. Bhopatkar to Mookerjee, 8 November 1946, SPM II-IV Installment, L.B. Bhopatkar Correspondence.

⁵¹ *Hindu Outlook*, 21 January 1947.

⁵² "A.I. Hindu Mahasabha: Resolutions Passed at the Gorakhpur Session," HMS M-18.

any Muslim country they choose. This is the only method of solving the Hindu Muslim problem in this country.⁵³

Deshpande warned Hindus should expect no level of government to provide them any protection from communal violence and exhorted them to undertake their own defence.

“[P]reparations are to be carried on on the assumption that riots would take place. . . .

[U]nless the capitalists come forward to finance these schemes and young men come forward to enrol themselves as volunteers, it is not possible to meet the menace.”⁵⁴

If the Mahasabhites were prepared to issue such bloodcurdling appeals in public, where their comments were monitored by the press and government, one can only surmise that when they met in private their discussions turned to the practicalities of organized violence against India’s Muslims.

The Pan-Hindu Front & the Princely Order: Hindu self-defence was coupled with calls for a pan-Hindu United Front embracing all sects, castes, and social classes. With a view to harnessing Hindu religiosity to the Hindu communal-political cause, the Gorakhpur session placed new emphasis on rallying Hindu religious leaders. A novel feature was the presence of a large number of *sadhus* (almost 1,000 according to *Hindu Outlook*), most of them mobilized by *Mahant* Digvijaynath. The session mandated the *Mahant* to campaign in the name of defending “Hindu religion” and “the honour of our temples and women-folk” to enrol *sadhus* and *sanyasis* in the Mahasabha en masse.⁵⁵

In contrast with the previous session, held in Bilaspur two years before, the Mahasabhite assembly at Gorakhpur gave socio-economic issues short shift. “We cannot

⁵³ “Fourth Session of All India Hindu Students Federation Gorakhpur 1946 Presidential Address by Syt. V.G. Deshpande. Published by Purushotom Singh Gen. Secy. Hindu Students Federation. Lucknow,” HMS M-17. Hereafter: Deshpande, Presidential Address.

⁵⁴ Deshpande, Presidential Address, HMS M-17

⁵⁵ *Hindu Outlook*, 14 and 21 January 1947; *A. I. Hindu Mahsabha: Resolutions Passed at the Gorakhpur Session*, HMS M-18.

afford to think of economic and social programs at this juncture,” Deshpande told the Hindu Students Federation.⁵⁶ The Mahasabhites did resolve, however, to redouble their efforts to win untouchable support. Not coincidentally, the session elected the longtime Mahar Mahasabhite G.A. Gavai to the Hindu Mahasabha Working Committee.⁵⁷

In showing renewed interest in the plight of the Untouchables, the Mahasabha was far from alone. In late 1946, the UP CID observed that the Congress, Arya Samaj, and Hindu Mahasabha were all intensifying their efforts to enlist untouchable support, by throwing open temples and practicing inter-dining.⁵⁸ This was in response to a Muslim League attempt to woo the Depressed Class political elite. In July the League had helped B.R. Ambedkar, the head of the Scheduled Castes Federation, secure a seat in the Constituent Assembly and it had included a Depressed Class politician from Bengal, J.C. Mandal, among its ministers in India’s interim government.

Mandal would remain allied with the League through Partition. Not Ambedkar. He severed his ties to the League—as indicated by his December 1946 Constituent Assembly appeal for Indian national unity—once it was evident that the Cabinet Mission Plan was foundering. In seeking to negotiate his way back into the Indian political mainstream, Ambedkar made overtures to the Hindu Mahasabha, meeting with Bhopatkar, the Mahasabha’s President-elect, shortly before the Gorakhpur session.⁵⁹ Historians have generally viewed Ambedkar and the Mahasabhites as natural enemies, but the Maharashtran untouchable leader shared the Mahasabhites’ antipathy to Gandhi

⁵⁶ Deshpande, Presidential Address, HMS M-17.

⁵⁷ *Hindu Outlook*, 14 January 1947; *A. I. Hindu Mahasabha: Resolutions Passed at the Gorakhpur Session*, HMS M-18.

⁵⁸ *UP Intelligence Abstracts*, 1, 8 and 22 November 1946.

⁵⁹ Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, “Transfer of Power and the Crisis of Dalit Politics in India, 1945-47,” *MAS*, 34, 2000, 935.

and their belief that the Muslims were alien to the Indian nation.⁶⁰ In Feb. 1947, the Mahasabha Working Committee discussed Ambedkar's constitutional proposals and appointed a sub-committee to pursue negotiations with him.⁶¹ In the absence of other evidence, we can only surmise that the negotiations were overtaken by the events of February/March 1947—the replacement of Wavell by Mountbatten, the rise of the Bengal partition movement, the collapse of the Unionist government in the Punjab and the subsequent eruption of massive communal violence in north-west India.

In keeping with the policy that the Mahasabha had pursued since the late 1930s, the Gorakhpur session appealed to the princes to play a leading role in the development of a pan-Hindu Front. But the princes were themselves increasingly threatened by peasant unrest and popular movements for democratic reform. The Gorakhpur session condemned the recent agitations against princely-rule mounted by the Kashmir National Conference and the CPI-led Trades Union Congress in Travancore as “subversive” and offered “hearty congratulations” to the Hindu princes of Kashmir and Travancore for having “put (them) down”—a euphemism for censorship, mass arrests, and shootings.⁶² The Mahasabhites accused the Congress of fomenting rebellion against the Hindu princes, when in fact the High Command was increasingly orientating toward a settlement with the Princely order, so long as the princes accepted the transfer of paramountcy from the *Raj* to independent India. Patel and Nehru had taken exception to the Kashmir National Conference's demand for the Maharaja to “Quit Kashmir” and the Congress-affiliated Praja Mandals were striving to prevent a frontal challenge to the

⁶⁰ Keith Meadowcroft, “Trading in religio-political identities?”

⁶¹ *Hindu Outlook*, 18 February 1947.

⁶² “A.I. Hindu Mahasabha: Resolutions Passed at the Gorakhpur Session,” HMS M-18. Louise Ouwerkerk, *No Elephants for the Maharaja: Social and Political Change in the Princely State of Travancore (1921-1947)* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1994) 242-48.

archaic political and socio-economic structures of Alwar and other states.⁶³ But the Mahasabhites' communalism and misplaced fears of Congress socio-economic radicalism made them oblivious to such subtleties.

Many of the princes were ready to patronize the Mahasabha as a counterweight to the Congress, but the princes' support was circumscribed by their determination to relinquish as little as possible of their despotic power to politicians, even pliant ones. Also the princes were leery of opening themselves to criticism from the *Raj* for being drawn into British Indian affairs. The Mahasabhites, meanwhile, damaged their prospects for closer collaboration with the princes by stoking communal violence.

The Mahasabha's problematic relations with the princes are well-illustrated by developments in the Central Indian state of Gwalior. By the middle of 1946, both Gwalior's Maratha ruler and the state's largest *jagirdar* were longtime patrons of the Mahasabha. A prominent Mahasabhite and former Central Provinces minister, R.M. Deshmukh, had even served as the state's Finance Minister from 1941-44. Buoyed by this support, the Gwalior Raja Hindu Sabha had captured four of five seats in the 1945 Gwalior City municipal election and had arguably become the most influential Mahasabha unit in all of princely India.

It therefore riled the Gwalior Mahasabhites when it was rumored in the fall of 1946 that the Maharaja was contemplating mimicking developments in British India and inviting representatives of the Congress and League into his Executive Council. Seizing on the Noakhali events, the Mahasabha mounted a series of violent, anti-Muslim demonstrations in November 1946, in which up to a dozen people were killed. The

⁶³ *Hindu Outlook*, 2 July 1946; *People's Age*, 11 August 1946; S.K. Ghosh, *India and the Raj*, V. 2, 305-6.

Secretary of the Gwalior Hindu Sabha, Bhagwan Prasad, was himself fatally wounded after stabbing one Muslim to death and wounding another. Unsatisfied with the steps taken by the *darbar* to end the violence, almost 20,000 Muslims fled the state. Prasad's funeral procession in early February 1947 touched off a further wave of rioting. Fearing that the British might intervene, the Maharaja imposed a curfew, arrested leading Mahasabhites and banned the local Hindu Sabha.⁶⁴

Foreshadowing developments on an all-India scale in the immediate post-independence period, the Gwalior Mahasabha had proved too incendiary even for a Prince willing to patronize, and possibly ally with, it.

II. The Mahasabha, the Transfer of Power and the Partition of British India

By mid-December 1946 Britain's Labour government had concluded that the Cabinet Mission Plan could not hold, while to try to secure British interests in South Asia by perpetuating the *Raj* would be folly.⁶⁵ Between then and Prime Minister Atlee's 20 February 1947 announcement that British rule would end no later than June 1948 the rift between the Congress and the Muslim League grew still deeper.

The Muslim League refused to enter the Constituent Assembly. Then in late January it launched an increasingly virulent agitation aimed at toppling the Unionist-Congress-Akali Dal coalition ministry in the Punjab. On February 5, the Congress demanded the League leave the interim government and later threatened itself to go into opposition unless the League ministers were forced from office. The British had hoped the Congress-League governmental partnership would pave the way for a constitutional settlement. Instead, it served to convince the Congress High Command that it could never

⁶⁴ *Hindu Outlook*, 27 August 1946 and 25 February 1947; Jaffrelot, Dissertation, 483.

⁶⁵ Hodson, 189-190; Mahajan, 162.

share power with the League on a permanent basis. Early in the new year, Patel is said to have become reconciled to Pakistan so long as it was shorn of its non-Muslim majority districts. For the INC's big business supporters, the budget introduced by the League Finance Minister Liaquat Ali Khan in March was the last straw. It dramatically hiked business taxes, thus transposing to the all-India level the traditional Muslim communal-political policy of favoring agricultural (essentially landlord) interests over commerce and industry.⁶⁶

Within this context, Shyama Prasad Mookerjee and Master Tara Singh emerged in February-March 1947 as the respective protagonists of the communal partition of Bengal and the Punjab. Mind you, the ultimate success of the campaign to partition the principal prospective provinces of Pakistan was bound up with the backing that it received from the Congress leadership. Determined to effect a quick transfer of power so as to avoid a mass mobilization and the attendant danger of a social explosion, the Congress abandoned any pretence of opposing Pakistan on the basis of principled opposition to the communalist two-nation theory. Instead it insisted that the logic of communal partition be strictly adhered to and Bengal and the Punjab communally partitioned. Meeting in early March, following the collapse of Punjab's coalition ministry and the outbreak of communal violence across the Punjab, the Congress Working Committee explicitly called for the province to be divided into Muslim- and non-Muslim majority provinces and suggested such action might be needed elsewhere.⁶⁷ In forwarding the CWC resolutions

⁶⁶ V.P. Menon, *The Transfer of Power*, 318, 330, 332-333, 335-337, 358-59; Hodson, 178-179; A.I. Singh, 209-211; S.K. Ghosh, *India and the Raj*, V. 2, 292. Speaking to a meeting of Calcutta businessmen in January, 1948, Patel conceded "confidence in the industrial future of India . . . had been widely shaken by the last budget" (*Leader*, 8 January 1948).

⁶⁷ The CWC resolutions are reproduced from an enclosure in J. Nehru to Wavell, 9 March 1947, *TOP*, 9: 899-901.

to the Viceroy, Nehru went considerably further, insisting the principle that the Congress leadership had applied to the Punjab was also applicable to Bengal: "In the event of the Muslim League not accepting the Cabinet Delegation's scheme and not coming into the Constituent Assembly, the division of Bengal and Punjab becomes inevitable."⁶⁸

The Partition of Bengal

In his principal address to the Gorakhpur session, Mookerjee revived the idea, much discussed during the 1942 League-Mahasabha negotiations, of partitioning Bengal on communal lines to create two provinces both of them integral to an independent, federal India—a Hindu-dominated West Bengal and a predominantly-Muslim East Bengal.⁶⁹ Soon after, the Bengal Provincial Hindu Sabha set up a sub-committee to "report on the feasibility and desirability" of creating a new province as "a homeland for Bengal Hindus."⁷⁰ The partition proposal excited much debate, with some Mahasabhites advocating an alternative campaign to enlarge Bengal so as to give it a Hindu-majority. But in mid-March, a Bengal Hindu Sabha conference attended by more than 400 delegates endorsed the demand for a Bengal Hindu homeland—a New Bengal—with just four dissenting votes. Mookerjee told the conference he would mount a "mass movement through peaceful means" to secure the partition of Bengal, but by coupling that vow with an appeal for Hindus to "resolve that, if need be, we would not hesitate to undergo any sacrifice" he indicated they should also ready themselves for a violent struggle.⁷¹ Reporting to the Viceroy on March 19th, the Bengal Governor said Hindu opinion remained "divided," although the partition movement "of which Shyama Prasad

⁶⁸ J. Nehru to Wavell, 9 March 1947, *TOP*, IX, 899.

⁶⁹ *Modern Review*, January 1947: 17.

⁷⁰ *Hindu Outlook*, 11 February 1947.

⁷¹ Kamala Sarkar, *Bengal Politics: 1937-1947* (Calcutta: Mukherjee & Co., 1990) 144; *Hindu Outlook*, 25 March 1947.

Mookerjee and Hindu Mahasabha" were the "chief protagonists" was "gathering momentum." Only three weeks later he would conclude "the weight of Hindu opinion" had swung behind partition.⁷²

The Mahasabha's partition campaign was meant to trump the League's Pakistan Demand. The loss of Bengal's metropolis and richer half would, it was hoped, convince the League and its followers that their plan for an eastern Pakistan was unviable. Failing that, the communal partition of Bengal would "save" the majority of Bengal's Hindus and the wealth of Calcutta for India.

Ultimately it was the second scenario that came to pass. Crucial to the 3 June 1947 agreement between the British, Muslim League and Congress to transfer power to Dominions of India and Pakistan was the provision of a mechanism for the communal partition of Bengal and the Punjab.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that the Mahasabha's partition plan was not conditional or predicated on the creation of Pakistan. Irrespective of whether an accommodation was reached at the all-India level between the League and Congress, the Bengal Mahasabhites were determined to create a West Bengal province so as to limit the reach and power of their Muslim communal-political rivals. And their scheme for two Bengals within an Indian federation was not limited to an administrative separation; it included the possibility of voluntary exchanges of population.

The claim that the partition of Bengal was imposed on the province from above—by the Congress High Command and the departing British imperialists—cannot

⁷² Burrows to Wavell, 19 March 1947, *TOP*, 9: Doc. 546; Burrows to Mountbatten, 11 April 1947, *TOP*, 10: 203.

pass muster.⁷³ By 1947 the *bhadralok*, including the powerful Hindu business houses, were bent on establishing a Bengali Hindu homeland so as to free themselves from the “tyranny” of a “Muslim-dominated” provincial government. Whilst the prospect of Pakistan troubled and frightened the *bhadralok*, the negotiations over the all-India constitutional/political order also gave its most powerful, Calcutta-based elements an opportunity to remove “the strangling hand of a ruthless communal majority.”⁷⁴ “The Bengali Hindus” exclaimed *Modern Review*, “... are going rapidly down even in those very areas where they are in a majority.

They have been completely ousted from all positions of political or administrative responsibility. . . . The judiciary is also being gradually Muslimised. . . . Supplies of essential commodities and the grant of trade license or contracts are distributed so as to ensure maximum gain for one community at the cost of the other. . . . The conspiracy to kill the Bengali Hindus culturally, economically and politically has reached the breaking point.⁷⁵

In March 1942, N.C. Chatterjee had urged every Bengali to “take a solemn vow ... not to allow Bengal to be partitioned or disrupted,” since “the Hindus and Muslims of Bengal” were divinely coupled “by the triple tie of one language, one script and one race.” Five years later, he argued that Bengal had to be communally partitioned so as to preserve a distinct Bengali Hindu nation. Partition, Chatterjee claimed, would “preserve Bengal’s culture,” “secure a Homeland for the Hindus of Bengal which will constitute a National State as part of India,” and “afford real protection” for the Hindus of east Bengal

⁷³ See for example, S.K. Ghosh, *Imperialism and the Raj, 1919-1947*, Vol. 2, 300-1.

⁷⁴ “Is Partition of Bengal Helpful to Hindus?” *Hindu Outlook*, 11 March 1947.

⁷⁵ *Modern Review*, February 1947: 87-88.

by enabling a Hindu-controlled West Bengal government to take reprisals on their behalf against the Muslims under its rule.⁷⁶

The Bengal Congress threw its weight behind the Mahasabha-led New Bengal campaign in early April. The same weekend that the Mahasabha organized a 50,000-strong pro-partition conference, Mookerjee attended as a special guest a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. The Congress meeting passed resolutions calling for Bengal to be partitioned into a Hindu-dominated west Bengal and a predominantly Muslim east Bengal and for the immediate establishment of separate provincial ministries in the “two regions” of Bengal.⁷⁷

Sarat Chandra Bose and a handful of other Congress leaders joined with the former Bengal Premier Suhrawardy in counterposing to the partition plan and to the All-India Muslim League’s Pakistan Demand, the call for a united Bengal, independent of both India and Pakistan. Within the Bengal Hindu Sabha there was also a dissident grouping. Ashutosh Lahiry, Kshitish Chandra Das, and others considered the partition campaign a surrender to Pakistan and militated for the Mahasabha to hold fast to its policy of marshalling Hindus’ all-India communal-political strength to subjugate the Muslims and reassert *bhadralok* dominance throughout Bengal.⁷⁸

These, however, were decidedly minority views. The campaign to partition Bengal rapidly garnered widespread support. It was most popular among the west Bengal *bhadralok*, but significant backing also came from Hindus of east Bengal and from the

⁷⁶ N.C. Chatterjee, *North-Bengal Hindu Conference. Presidential Address. Delivered by Sj. N.C. Chatterjee, Working President of the Bengal Hindu Mahasabha*, (Calcutta: Bhowanipore Press, 1942) 6; N.C. Chatterjee, *Bengal Provincial Hindu Conference: Presidential Address by Sj. N.C. Chatterjee* (Calcutta: N.C. Chatterjee, c. 1947) 1 and 3-4.

⁷⁷ *IAR*, I, 1947: 238-40; Burrows to Mountbatten, 11 April 1947, *TOP*, 10: 203; Kamala Sarkar, 145-46.

⁷⁸ Statement of Ashutosh Lahiry, HMS General Secretary, undated: HMS M-17; *Hindu Outlook*, 18 March 1947.

Depressed Classes political elite, which in the past had often opposed campaigns initiated by the upper caste led-Congress and Mahasabha. One reason east Bengali Hindus embraced partition was that the Mahasabhites promoted the belief many of them would find their towns and villages incorporated in the Bengal Hindu homeland. N.C. Chatterjee said there was “nothing to stand in the way” of portions of Faridpur and other majority Muslim districts in east Bengal being included within the borders of the New Bengal. The Dacca Town Hindu Sabha passed a resolution stipulating that all municipalities with a majority Hindu population should be included in the new province.⁷⁹

Joya Chatterjee has argued that the Congress quickly co-opted the Mahasabha partition campaign: “While the two organizations worked closely together in the cause of partition, the Congress unquestionably took the lead in orchestrating the campaign.”⁸⁰ Chatterjee’s *Bengal Divided* is an important contribution to the study of Bengal politics and Hindu communalism. Her central argument is well-taken: The *bhadralok* retreated from Indian nationalism, and, during the last quarter century of British rule, developed a Bengali Hindu communal/national identity that justified the perpetuation of their class and communal dominance of Bengal. When it comes to the Bengal partition campaign, however, she fails to appreciate the volatility of the situation and unduly dismisses the role the Mahasabha played as a stalking horse and pressure group for the Hindu *bhadralok*. Unquestionably, the support of the High Command and the Bengal Congress were decisive to the success of the Bengal partition drive. But the Bengal Mahasabha had blazed the trail. Even after the majority of the Bengal Congress had thrown its weight behind the partition campaign, Mookerjee remained its principal public spokesman.

⁷⁹ N.C. Chatterjee, *Bengal Provincial Hindu Conference*, 11; Kamala Sarkar, 145.

⁸⁰ J. Chatterjee, *Bengal Divided*, 250. See also 249.

Contemporary accounts invariably point to the Mahsabha's role. "The lead for partition has been taken by the Hindu Mahasabha ..." observed Suhrawardy in late April 1947.⁸¹ "The Congress stand regarding partition," complained Sarat Chandra Bose, "has ... brought back the Hindu Mahasabha to life and considerably strengthened its position."⁸² It was Mookerjee, the leader of a tiny two-man Hindu Nationalist grouping in the Bengal Assembly, who argued the Bengali Hindus' partition brief before the Viceroy and who on May 13 confronted Gandhi over his tentative support for Bose's and Suhrawardy's United Bengal scheme.⁸³ (Admittedly Patel and Nehru were making their own representations to both Mountbatten and the Mahatma.)

In the partition campaign, Mookerjee effectively realized his longstanding goal of a Congress-Mahasabha alliance in defence of Hindu communal-political interests. But if the Bengal Hindu Mahasabha could play this role, it was because the Congress had helped ensure its political survival. It had, for example, elected Mookerjee to the Constituent Assembly and it routinely echoed the Mahasabha's communalist condemnations of the discriminatory policies pursued by Bengal's Muslim League Ministry.

Following the June 20 vote of the Bengal Assemblymen who represented majority-Hindu districts to communally partition the province—a vote presided over by Mookerjee's cohort and the province's largest landowner, the Maharaja of Burdwan—the Mahasabha and Congress continued to cooperate.⁸⁴ The Mahasabha and Congress

⁸¹ "Note by Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy on the Partition of Bengal," *Quaid-I-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah Papers*, First Series, V. 1, 609.

⁸² Sarat Chandra Bose to V. Patel, 27 May 1947, Patel Papers, V. 4, 45.

⁸³ "Record of Interview between Rear-Admiral Viscount Mountbatten of Burma and Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherji," *TOP*, 10: 374-75; Pyarelal, *The Last Phase*, V. 2, 183-84.

⁸⁴ Leonard A. Gordon, *Brothers Against the Raj*, 586.

collaborated in making the “Hindu” case before the Radcliffe Boundary Commission, with N.C. Chatterjee putting forth the joint view of the Congress and Hindu Mahasabha regarding Sylhet.⁸⁵ This collaboration did not preclude the Hindu Mahasabha submitting its own maximalist demands in respect to the borders of the Hindu Bengal province. After all, since its revival in 1939 the Bengal Hindu Sabha had been disproportionately concentrated in east Bengal and, as we saw, in the New Bengal agitation it had promoted implausible notions as to the new province’s scope among the Hindus of Dacca and other Muslim-majority districts.⁸⁶

The Bengal Hindu Sabha’s failure to make appreciable organizational gains from the partition campaign and emerge as a contender for power in post-independence West Bengal might appear to contradict the above analysis. This failure however, can be readily explained. The Mahasabha was politically and organizationally shattered by its rout in the 1945-46 elections. It was therefore severely impeded in exploiting the surge in popular support. For the first time, reported the General Secretary of the Barisal District Hindu Sabha in early May 1947, the District’s leading Congressmen had spoken from a Mahasabha platform. There “is a swing of the pendulum on our side. It is heartening, but lack of men and money is a great hindrance of our march.”⁸⁷ Also an unintended result of the New Bengal campaign was the marginalization of the maverick, self-styled socialist Sarat Chandra Bose, who had stubbornly, some might say valiantly, opposed partition. The neutering of Bose—he would quit the INC in 1948—did much to reassure big

⁸⁵ Prakash, *History of the Hindu Mahasabha*, 1952 edition, 400; J. Nehru to Baldev Singh, 21 July 1947, *J. Nehru Works*, 2nd Series, V. 3, 170. See also, Joya Chatterjee, “The making of a borderline: the Radcliffe award for Bengal, *Region and Partition: Bengal, Punjab and the Partition of the Subcontinent*, ed. Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh (Karachi: OUP, 1999).

⁸⁶ J. Chatterjee, “Radcliffe Award,” 184.

⁸⁷ Lakshmi Kanta Sen Gupta, 7 May 1947, SPM, II-IV Instalment, File 62, Part 1.

business and other elite elements that the Congress could be counted on to uphold their interests and stanch the rise of the Communist Party.

Last but not least, there were the internal divisions within the Mahasabha. The Bengal Mahasabhis received little support for their partition campaign from their brethren in the rest of India.⁸⁸ In fact, many prominent Mahasabhis outside Bengal—including the Mahasabha's All-India President, L.B. Bhopatkar, a majority of activists in its Maharashtra stronghold, and the editors of *Hindu Outlook*—opposed the New Bengal campaign. Not only did they consider it a betrayal of *Akhand Hindusthan*, they were troubled by the suggestion that the Bengali Hindus constituted a nationality distinct from the Hindu nation.⁸⁹

Savarkar, by contrast, did repeatedly endorse the Bengal partition campaign, beginning with a telegram he sent to Mookerjee March 21 “emphatically” supporting the demand for a Hindu-majority Bengal. But in both an internal circular to the Mahasabha membership and public statements he emphasized that “vivisecting” Pakistan through the partition of Bengal and the Punjab should be but the first step in re-annexing “the revolting Pakistani areas.”⁹⁰

The advent of Pakistan in North-West India

In the Punjab it was the Sikh Akali Dal, not the Hindu Mahasabha, that spearheaded the drive for the province's communal partition. In early February 1947, contemporaneously with the Bengal Provincial Hindu Sabha setting up a committee to

⁸⁸ Craig Baxter, *The Jana Sangh: A Biography of an Indian Political Party* (Bombay: OUP, 1971) 24.

⁸⁹ Gondhalekhar and Bhattacharya, 50 and 68, n.12; *Hindu Outlook*, 11 February and 4 March, 1947; V.G. Deshpande, “Homeland for Bengal Hindus,” HMS M-17.

⁹⁰ Savarkar to S.P. Mookerjee, 21 March 1947 and “Before they vivisect India let us vivisect their Pakistan first,” *Savarkar Writings*, 557-558; Keer, 380-81; Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, 531; N.C. Chatterjee, *Presidential Address By Shri N.C. Chatterjee, M.P., President All-India Hindu Mahasabha, 30th Session Bhopal (28 December, 1952)*, (New Delhi: General Secretary All-India Hindu Mahasabha) 9.

consider the desirability of a Bengali Hindu province, the Sikh Akali Dal mandated Baldev Singh and Master Tara Singh to draft a plan for partitioning the Punjab. The Working Committee of the Punjab Hindu Sabha opposed this initiative and the increasing calls from the Congress camp for Punjab's communal division. Punjab Mahasabhites, exalted *Hindu Outlook*, "are not prepared to make the best out of the worst bargain."⁹¹

The Hindu Sabha was a far less potent force in the Punjab than it was in Bengal. The Hindu Sabha-aligned National Progressive Party had been mauled in the 1937 elections, subsequently fractured over whether to participate in the Unionist Ministry, then was eliminated altogether in the 1946 provincial poll. By the middle war years, many of the Mahasabha's Punjabi followers had transferred their primary allegiance to the RSS. Ironically, this political weakness appears to have strengthened the Punjab Mahasabhites' opposition to anything that smacked of compromise with Pakistan.

But two other factors were in play. Whereas Calcutta was squarely in that part of Bengal where Hindus comprised the majority, Lahore, the center of Punjabi Hindu commercial and economic power, was in a Muslim-majority district. Second, there were apprehensions among the Mahasabhites that partition would further the cause of creating a Jat-dominated province or Jat-stan. There was a longstanding antagonism between the upper caste, urban professional and banker-trader element who comprised the backbone of the Punjab Hindu Sabha and the Jat political elite, which had supported the Unionist Party and its anti-business/pro-landlord legislative program

All this is not to say that the Mahasabha did not play a significant role in the tumult that preceded the August 1947 legal-political partition of the Punjab. As elsewhere, the Mahasabha experienced a revival in the final months of 1946, a revival to

⁹¹ Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, 510; *Hindu Outlook*, 4 March 1947.

which the Congress contributed by staging joint functions with the Mahasabhites to mark the death of Madan Mohan Malaviya. In the new year, the Punjabi Mahasabhites began enlisting Hindusthan National Guards. By mid-March, shortly after the collapse of the Unionist-Congress-Akali Dal coalition government and with communal violence convulsing much of the province, especially Rawalpindi and other north-eastern districts, government intelligence reports claimed Mahasabha meetings were outdrawing those of Congress.⁹²

The Punjab Governor tried to bar Mahasabha President Bhopatkar and General Secretary Lahiry from mounting a Punjab tour. But with the Mahasabha threatening to launch an all-India campaign against the ban and Bhopatkar insisting that the sole purpose of his visit would be to observe and organize relief, the Governor relented. The Mahasabha President did not prove good to his word. In public gatherings, he urged Punjabi Hindus to reject the non-violence creed of the Congress and “strike terror into the hearts of Muslim *goondas*. History teaches us that the best defense of one’s life, liberty and property lies in making the same of the other worth not even a moment’s purchase.”⁹³ Bhopatkar’s use of relief efforts as a cover to agitate for communal violence was a common ruse. The CID held that most of the relief and legal defence committees were “nothing but a front behind which terrorist organizations” were built up.⁹⁴

Whatever their differences with the Sikh Akali Dal leadership over the merits of partition, the Hindu Mahasabha worked closely with it in the final months of British rule.

⁹² Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, 530.

⁹³ Telegram to Punjab Governor, 18 March 1947, and Circular Letter of Bhopatkar, 20 March 1947, HMS P-111; *Hindu Outlook*, 25 March 1947.

⁹⁴ Cited in Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, 545.

Mahasabha support apparently smoothed the way for Master Tara Singh to conduct a successful Calcutta fund raising tour.⁹⁵ Intelligence reports also bear witness to close collaboration between the Mahasabha and RSS. Mahasabha leaders were said to be “directly inspiring the underground terrorist of the RSS.”⁹⁶ Whilst the Punjab Mahasabhites had had to cede leadership of the Hindu nationalist movement to the RSS, it needs to be borne in mind that outside Maharashtra nowhere was the overlap between the two organizations so great. Parmanand’s son-in-law, Dharm Vir, was one of the RSS’s principal provincial organizers. According to the president of the Ambala City Hindu Sabha, “Long ago, some of the members of the Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh had joined the Hindu Sabha, while some of the Hindu Sabha members joined the R.S.S. as at that time, the R.S.S. was regarded [as] an organization with the same objectives as those of Hindu Maha Sabha.”⁹⁷

In late May *Hindu Outlook* was still insisting “not an inch of land of the Punjab should be converted into Pakistan—let aside the partition of the Punjab.”⁹⁸ But communal violence had already caused large numbers of Hindus and Sikhs to flee west Punjab. Even before the official announcement in early June of the mechanics of Partition, many Mahasabhites had made preserving Lahore for India their principal aim. Since non-Muslims owned the bulk of Lahore’s businesses and paid the majority of the taxes, Punjab’s principal city rightfully belonged, or so they argued, to the Hindus and Sikhs. But class and caste antagonisms continued to belie the communalist claim that Punjab was comprised of discrete religious communities with common interests. The

⁹⁵ Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, 525.

⁹⁶ Cited in Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, 545.

⁹⁷ Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, 531; Mahabir Pershad to HMS Office Secretary, 5 November 1952, HMS P-132.

⁹⁸ *Hindu Outlook*, 20 May 1947.

Chief Secretary to the Punjab Governor suggested the attempt of the Jat political elite in Haryana to prevent “interference” by west Punjab refugees in “Eastern politics and Services” could “give the rejuvenated Mahasabha another weapon” to attack the Congress.⁹⁹

The Punjab Provincial Hindu Sabha endorsed and adopted as its own the memorandum the Congress submitted to the Punjab Boundary Commission, the body charged with drawing the dividing line between Pakistani and Indian Punjab.¹⁰⁰ In the past, the Congress had condemned the Mahasabhites’ for their communal fixation on census returns and their campaigns to maximize the Hindu count. Yet in its submission to the Punjab Boundary Commission, the Congress cited as an authority on the inaccuracy of the 1941 census the then Punjab Hindu Mahasabha President, the late Raja Narendra Nath, and reproduced in full the text of a resolution condemning the accuracy of the census passed by a 1941 meeting of the Mahasabha-aligned Hindu Youngmen’s Association.¹⁰¹

The Mahasabha’s Response to the June 3rd Settlement

On June 3rd the British Prime Minister announced a formula for the transfer of power that replaced the failed Cabinet Mission Plan and to which the topmost Congress, Muslim League, and Sikh leaders had acquiesced only hours before. Because of Jinnah’s

⁹⁹ “Report on the situation in the Punjab for the second half of July, 1947,” in *Select Documents on Partition of Punjab—1947: India and Pakistan*, ed. Kirpal Singh (Delhi: National Book Shop, 1991) 301.

¹⁰⁰ Mian Muhammad Sadullah, ed., *Partition of the Punjab, 1947: A Compilation of Official Documents*, Vol. 1 (Lahore: National Documentation Centre, 1983) 474.

¹⁰¹ “Memorandum Submitted to the Punjab Boundary Commission by the Indian National Congress,” *Select Documents on Partition of Punjab—1947: India and Pakistan*, 195 and Sadullah Vol. 1, 303-4.

ambivalence some are reluctant to term the June 3rd formula a settlement. This is unjustified. The League, like the Congress, accepted and implemented its provisions.¹⁰²

Since the June 3rd settlement effectively conceded Pakistan, even if a “shrunk” one shorn of west Bengal and east Punjab, it was inevitable that the Mahasabha would term it a Congress “betrayal.” What needs to be emphasized is the vehemence of the Mahasabhis’ opposition. Meeting June 8, the Mahasabha leadership vowed there would “never be peace” in South Asia until partition was reversed:

The [Mahasabha’s All-India] Committee declares that Hindus are not bound by this commitment of the Congress. It reiterates that India is one and indivisible and that there will never be peace unless the separated areas are brought back into the Indian Union and made its integral parts.¹⁰³

Mookerjee sought to temper the Mahasabha’s opposition, arguing that to entirely reject the transfer of power agreement would place a question mark over the legitimacy of Bengal’s communal partition. He urged his fellow Mahasabhis to accept the three-quarters of India proffered Hindus under the June 3rd settlement and work to Hinduize the new Dominion.¹⁰⁴

After considerable debate, the Mahasabhis adopted a resolution that acknowledged the partition of Bengal and the Punjab “will rescue millions of Hindus and Sikhs from the Muslim League.” Whilst the resolution condemned the tentative allocation of Punjab and Bengal territory made by the June 3rd Agreement as “unjust” to Hindus and Sikhs, it also indicated support for using the partition machinery to limit the size of

¹⁰² The agreement stipulated mechanisms to determine whether a Muslim-majority Dominion would be created, which provinces it would include, and whether the partition of British India would also entail the communal partition of Bengal and the Punjab. In most instances the decisions were to be taken by the members of the provincial legislatures, but the agreement provided for binding referenda in the NWFP and the Assamese district of Sylhet. See *TOP*, 11: 89-94 for the text of the British Prime Minister’s statement detailing the agreement.

¹⁰³ *Mahratta*, 13 June 1947.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*; *Leader*, 10 June 1947.

Pakistan. Nevertheless, in as much as the resolution declared Hindus were not bound by the commitment given by the Congress and implied support for the violent reunification of the subcontinent, it was the rejectionists who prevailed. Moreover, the Mahasabha warned that if India was not transformed forthwith into a "powerful Hindu state," Hindus could soon "lose even what is left to them of India."¹⁰⁵

During the final weeks of British rule, the Mahasabha sought to mobilize opposition to the transfer of power settlement agreement, beginning with a national day of "Shame and Humiliation" held one-month to the day after June 3rd. Five days later the Mahasabha and the Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee mounted an "Anti-Pakistan Day." The results of these protests were mixed. The July 3rd protests won considerable support, with many Hindu-owned businesses closing for the day in major north and west Indian cities, including Amritsar, Delhi, Allahabad, Patna, and Poona. Thirty of Bombay's 68 textile mills had to halt production due to employee walkouts. But for many participants the protests were directed more against the League and Pakistan than against the Congress and the June 3rd settlement. This was especially true of the July 8 Anti-Pakistan Day, which was supported by Baldeo Singh, minister in India's interim government and himself the Sikh representative at the June 2-3 conference that had finalized the transfer of power agreement. The Mahasabha's agitation against the June 3rd Agreement did, however, contribute to a surge in recruitment to the Hindusthan National Guards.¹⁰⁶

Bullying and fear are oft entwined. This was true in the case of the Hindu nationalists. While the Mahasabhites would declaim Hindu supremacy and vow that

¹⁰⁵ *Mahratta*, 13 June 1947.

¹⁰⁶ Ashutosh Lahiry to General Secretaries of the Provincial Hindu Sabhas, Circular letter, 17 June 1947, HMS M-18; *Leader*, 5 and 10 July; *Gandhi Murder Inquiry*, Part 2, 51; Jaffrelot, *Dissertation*, 486.

Muslims would soon succumb to Hindu retribution, they would conjure up images of almost unbridled Muslim power in their very next breath. Thus Savarkar argued that if the Mahasabha accepted Muslims members, a Muslim might accede to the Mahasabha Presidency and Mahasabhite propaganda was replete with warnings of an imminent Pakistani invasion. "The Muslim League aims at the conquest of Hindustan and conversion of Hindus into Islam," exclaimed a Mahasabha leaflet.¹⁰⁷

In keeping with its rejection of the June 3rd agreement, the Mahasabha mounted black flag demonstrations on August 15 and the lone Mahasabhite in the Bombay Legislative Assembly made a point of refusing to swear loyalty to the new, provisional constitution.¹⁰⁸ These were gestures—gestures, however, that when placed within a broader context conform to a pattern of active opposition to India's new political order. Below we shall demonstrate that in the name of Hindu Rashtra the Mahasabha sought to provide a platform for landlord and princely opposition to the emergent bourgeois democratic order and to impart an expressly communal character to the fledgling Indian state.

But before so doing, we must pause to note that notwithstanding the Mahasabha's oppositional stance, it was aligned with India's new Congress rulers and this was not simply a *de facto* alliance that sprang from a common desire to limit the territory allotted Pakistan and help Sikh and Hindu refugees. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee was named to the first post-independence Cabinet as Minister of Industry and Supply. Although Mookerjee was not a Mahasabha nominee per se, Nehru knew that he had accepted the cabinet appointment only after obtaining Bhoptakar's and Savarkar's

¹⁰⁷ Savarkar, *Writings*, 561; as cited in Tucker, 387.

¹⁰⁸ *Leader*, 12 August 1947 and 12 September 1947; Asutosh Lahiry to Bhimsen, General Secretary, Hindu Sabha, Ferozepur, 27 August 1947, HMS P-111

blessing. While in government Mookerjee continued to profess loyalty to the Mahasabha and when the Congress leadership passed a resolution condemning the Mahasabha as a communal organization, he even offered to resign if his Mahasabha membership were deemed incompatible with the government's policy and philosophy.¹⁰⁹

Various justifications and explanations have been advanced for the Congress including Mookerjee in the government. These include that the Congress leadership was anxious to remove him from West Bengal where his popularity constituted a threat to the Congress provincial government and that Nehru and Patel wanted to broaden the government's base after the Socialists had declined an offer of cabinet representation.¹¹⁰ These explanations however cannot dispel the incongruity of a purportedly secular government welcoming into its ranks a prominent leader of a party infamous for stoking communal enmity and violence and at a time when the Congress ostensibly was anxious to calm the fears of the Muslim minority. Nor can Mookerjee's inclusion be attributed to the compulsions of the moment. To pave the way for the Congress to join a national government, Cripps had thought it politic in April 1942 to obtain Savarkar's assurances that the Mahasabha would also participate. At the 1945 Simla conference, the Congress leadership had included Mookerjee on its list of nominees for the proposed provisional government.

III: Mahasabha "Direct Action" and the death rattle of the UP aristocracy

Fifteen days before the British were to relinquish power, the Hindu Mahasabha launched "direct action" against the Congress Ministry of the United Provinces. A like

¹⁰⁹ *Leader*, 4 August 1947; J. Nehru to S.P. Mookerjee, letters of 28 and 30 September 1947, *J. Nehru Works*, Second Series, V. 4, 506-507.

¹¹⁰ "Viceroy's Personal Reports, Nos. 15 and 16," *TOP*, 12: 452 and 601.

agitation in Bihar was planned to begin August 2nd, postponed to the 9th, then postponed again. The Mahasabhites hoped a successful mobilization of Hindu nationalist strength in north India would fan an all-India challenge to the Congress. But the Mahasabha campaign fizzled in the face of a concerted mobilization of state power. On the evening of July 31, shortly after talks between UP Provincial Hindu Sabha President *Mahant* Digvijaynath and Congress Premier G.B. Pant had collapsed, the provincial government ordered the immediate detention of scores of Mahasabha leaders. The Congress Ministry also issued a new ordinance amending the United Provinces Maintenance of Order Act so as to empower the government to take over managing the lands, mills and other properties of persons detained for joining or supporting the Mahasabha agitation. The arrests decapitated the Hindu Mahasabha campaign. The first contingent of Mahasabhites to court arrest in Lucknow was just twenty strong, and only eighty volunteers were detained in the provincial capital during the agitation's first day. In less than a week, the direct action movement had petered out.¹¹¹ General Tucker, whose military command included UP, argues that the Pant Ministry's vigorous repression of the Mahasabha campaign was pivotal in preventing "this province from going the way of the Punjab" and descending into mass communal violence.¹¹²

The UP Hindu Sabha had established a Council of Action in May. Ultimately, it formulated ten demands whose implementation it described as necessary "to protect the Hindu nation from total annihilation." These demands were in keeping with the Mahasabha's emergent campaign for India to be transformed into a Hindu *Raj*. They included: making Hindi the sole official language; limiting all key administrative posts to

¹¹¹ *Leader*, 2-8 and 12 August 1947.

¹¹² Tucker, 386.

Hindus; replacing the province's Interior Minister Rafi Ahmed Kidwai with a Hindu; outlawing cow-killing; and removing the ban on government employees taking part in RSS. activities. Other of the Mahasabha demands were aimed at exploiting discontent over the UP colonial administration's practice of favoring Muslims in government employment, especially the staffing of the police.¹¹³ Whilst these grievances had some legitimacy, to have dismissed Muslim police personnel en masse, as the Mahasabha demanded, under conditions where the country was beset by communal violence and about to be partitioned, would have sent a chilling message to India's Muslim minority.

In rallying the public against the Mahasabha, the Congress emphasized that, with the brief exception of the agitation surrounding the ban on its Bhagalpur session, the Mahasabha had never mounted direct action against the *Raj* and had cooperated with the British regime throughout the Second World War.¹¹⁴

What accounts for the Mahasabhites' new found militancy? Unquestionably, Hindu nationalist ideologues like *Mahant* Digvijaynath were incensed by the June 3rd settlement. But the Mahasabha challenge to the UP Congress government derived its vigor from big landlord outrage over pending land reform legislation. In the fall of 1946 the Congress government had established a Zamindari Abolition Committee to make recommendations as to the mechanics and aims of land reform and in the spring of 1947 it had taken various steps to curb landlord power, including passing legislation, in response to mounting rural violence, that empowered the government to place estates that were wracked by *kisan* discontent under trusteeship.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ *Leader*, 27 May 1947; Tej Narain to G.B. Pant, 10 July 1947, HMS P-108.

¹¹⁴ *Leader*, 29 July 47.

¹¹⁵ *Leader*, 23 May 1947. Peter Reeves, *Landlords and Government in Uttar Pradesh*, 270-75.

During the 1945-46 elections, the Mahasabha's *taluqdar* and *zamindar* support evaporated. But the landlords' hopes the Congress might be persuaded to drop its election pledge of land reform were quickly dashed. In response to an August 1946 legislative resolution affirming the principal of *zamindari* abolition, a new Zamindars' Union was established with the aim of uniting the *taluqdars* of Oudh with their less illustrious Agra brethren. The landlords boycotted the Zamindari Abolition Committee, turned out in force at the Mahasabha's Gorakhpur session, and were well-represented on the UP Hindu Sabha's Council of Action.¹¹⁶

In his authoritative study of government-*zamindar* relations in twentieth century UP, Peter Reeves lists five persons as the most active and effective leaders of the opposition to *zamindari* abolition.¹¹⁷ Of these, two—the Raja of Jagmanpur, and Phul Kumari, the Rani of Sherkot and the President of the Zamindars' Union—sat on the UP Hindu Sabha's Council of Action.¹¹⁸ Hari Ram Seth, the secretary of the *taluqdars'* British Indian Association, had long been a prominent Mahasabha leader and one of the principal bankrollers of the All-India organization.¹¹⁹ As for Guru Narain, although he had quit the Mahasabha in 1945, he continued to promote the ideology of Hindu *sangathan* through a parallel organization and was arrested at the beginning of the Mahasabha agitation.¹²⁰ Of Reeves' activist landlords only Sir Jagdish Prasad, the General-Secretary of the Zamindars' Union and future head of the pro-landlord Praja Party, stood aloof from the Mahasabha agitation. Nonetheless, he joined with the

¹¹⁶ Peter Reeves, 271-72; *Hindu Outlook*, 14 January 1947; *Leader* 22 May 1947. For more on the United Provinces Zamindars' Union, see Reeves 270-289.

¹¹⁷ Reeves, 277-78.

¹¹⁸ *Leader*, 22 May 1947.

¹¹⁹ "List of Prominent Donors," HMS C-27; *Hindu Outlook*, 30 January 1945.

¹²⁰ *Leader*, 2 August 1947; *Mahratta*, 12 September 1947.

Mahasabhites in warning that Hinduism was in danger. In an August 1947 speech he charged that the Congress attack on zamindari was inspired by Lenin's dictum that the key to uprooting religion was to destroy the property-owning classes. "The landlords in fighting for their continued existence will," declaimed Prasad, "also be fighting for the preservation of much that we value in our ancient civilization and culture."¹²¹

The shift of the landlord elite, or at least much of it, back to the Mahasabha found electoral expression in its victory in a UP Legislative Council by-election in June 1947. The Raja of Tikra, a longtime UP Mahasabhite leader, captured the Sitapur seat formerly held by the late Maheshwar Dayal.¹²²

With so many landlords involved in the Mahasabha agitation, and after July 31 subject to detention, it is hardly surprising Reeves found that "over the period of the partition and the transfer of power itself" the Zamindars' Union "remained quiet."¹²³ Stung by charges the Mahasabha was acting as a stalking horse for the *zamindars*, its All-India Working Committee made the risible retort that the Mahasabha was "more socialistic in its outlook" than the Congress.

Although the UP government took stern measures to thwart the Mahasabha agitation, the Congress leadership was otherwise solicitous toward Hindu communal sentiment. In the run-up to the August 1 deadline, Pant and other provincial ministers repeatedly conversed and corresponded with Mahasabha leaders.¹²⁴ A government communiqué deplored that the Mahasabha had resorted to direct action when "we are getting after a thousand years the opportunity to mould the destinies of the country

¹²¹ *Leader*, 26 August 1947. Prasad's role in the UPZU is discussed in Reeves, 278-283.

¹²² *Leader*, 19 June 1947; *Hindu Outlook*, 1 July 1947.

¹²³ Reeves, 280.

¹²⁴ *Leader*, 24 July to 2 August 1947. For a report of an earlier meeting between Pant and a Mahasabha delegation to discuss its direct action threat, see *Leader*, 28 May 1947.

according to our own cultural tradition.”¹²⁵ In a detailed, published reply to the Mahasabha’s demands, Pant rejected the Hindu nationalists’ call for discrimination against Muslims in government employment, but observed that the return of Britons to their mother country and the departure of many Muslim government employees for Pakistan necessitated a reshuffling of positions in the services “and most of the important posts will be filled by Hindu officers.” Making Hindi the sole official language, thus stripping Urdu of its role and status as a language of public affairs, was, wrote Pant, “under the active consideration of Government and final orders” would be issued “in due course.”¹²⁶ In public speeches, Pant and other Congress leaders sought to show that they had done more to uphold the Hindu cause than the Mahasabha. The Premier made repeated references to the fact that during the war, when the Mahasabha was supporting the British regime, cow-slaughter attained new heights. Moreover, it was Gandhi who had “saved Hinduism” by mounting a fast to the death in 1932 to resist separate electorates for the Depressed Classes.¹²⁷

At the very point that the Mahasabha and Congress clashed in UP, negotiations over Mookerjee’s inclusion in the post-independence Union cabinet reached their climax.¹²⁸ Ultimately, Mookerjee played an important role in convincing the leadership of the UP Provincial Hindu Sabha to abandon their direct action campaign. Although *Mahant* Digvijaynath was still under detention, he was transferred to the cabinet minister’s Delhi residence in late August for discussions.¹²⁹ With Pant adamant that the

¹²⁵ *Leader*, 2 and 3 August 1947.

¹²⁶ *Leader*, 2 August 1947; G.B. Pant to Tej Narain, undated, *G.B. Pant Works*, V. 11, 157-161.

¹²⁷ Report of 1 August Congress meeting in Lucknow, *Leader*, 3 August 1947; Pant’s 3 August speech in Cawnpore, *G.B. Pant Works*, Vol. 11, 161-63.

¹²⁸ *Leader*, 4 August 1947.

¹²⁹ *Leader*, 2 September 1947.

Congress could not be seen to make concessions under threat, the September 6-8 meeting of the All-India Mahasabha Working Committee resolved to withdraw the UP agitation. The burgeoning refugee crisis, it declared, demanded Mahasabhites' full attention.¹³⁰

The Mahasabha's UP Direct Action campaign was akin to the landlord order's death rattle and not only because of its manifest failure. It symbolized the collapse, under the weight of rival communalisms, of the order's syncretic culture. While many Muslim UP landlords were preparing to decamp to Pakistan, Hindu *zamindars* and *taluqdars* were agitating for Hindu *Raj*.

IV: The Mahasabha and the Erosion of Princely Power

Historians frequently note the symmetry in the contemporaneous passing of the *landlord and Princely orders, but this is very much a retrospective insight. The fate of the zamindari system had to a large extent been decided by the outcome of the 1937 and 1945-46 elections, but not that of princely rule. Throughout the transfer of power negotiations, the British insisted paramountcy was untransferable and that full sovereignty would revert to the princely states when the Raj expired. The Congress leadership was very much alive to this threat of "Balkanization," not least because countering it might require sanctioning popular rebellion. So when Mountbatten pledged to cajole a "full basket" of states into ceding control—albeit only provisionally—of their External Affairs, Defence and Communications to the Indian Union, Nehru and Patel could scarcely contain their glee.¹³¹ What the Congress leaders didn't know was that this secret undertaking was made by the Viceroy without authorization from his political*

¹³⁰ *Leader*, 2 September, 1947; *Mahratta*, 26 September 1947.

¹³¹ Mountbatten to Earl of Listowel, 8 August 1947, TOP, 12: 586.

masters.¹³² Indeed, in keeping with longstanding British policy, the Secretary of State was still toying in late June with the notion that Britain could gain strategic advantage by establishing privileged relations with states that chose to stand apart from both India and Pakistan.¹³³

That the British reneged on their commitments to the princes in the end game of empire is incontestable. But British duplicity was only one of many factors in the passing of the princely order. The princes proved themselves singularly incapable of apprehending the threat to their rule and organizing to meet it. In December 1946, the Chamber of Princes categorically rejected responsible government—let alone universal suffrage—saying any changes to government should reflect “the composite character of the Society and the main elements in the life of each state.” Representation based on “numbers” was to be avoided.¹³⁴ The princes were living in a “dreamland,” warned a long-time *Raj* strategist.¹³⁵ Only a small minority were astute enough to recognize that the Congress leadership was anxious for their support and that their best bet lay in trying to reach an accommodation with India’s future rulers prior to the completion of the transfer of power negotiations.

Whilst the princes lacked foresight, energy, and a clear and common purpose, they had schemes aplenty to preserve, even increase, their power. These schemes included seeking Dominion status as independent states, creating a confederation of princely India, and forming regional states’ unions. More than a few princes—Hindu as

¹³² Copland, *The Princes of India*, 255; Earl of Listowel to Mountbatten, 1 August 1947 and Mountbatten to Listowel, 8 August 1947, TOP, 12: 459-61 and 584-85.

¹³³ A.I. Singh, 233-34.

¹³⁴ Cited in Copland, *The Princes of India*, 232.

¹³⁵ Wylie to Wavell, 7 February 1947, TOP, 10: 640.

well as Muslim—considered affiliating their states with Pakistan in the hope this would insulate them from the popular groundswell for political and socio-economic reform.

Dynastic, caste and clan rivalries, the divergent interests of the small, mid-sized and large states and, last but not least, the growth of communalism all served to erode the princes' capacity to act in concert.¹³⁶ The Hindu princes were "blind to their interests" and motivated solely by desire to "wipe off the Moslems from the face of earth" complained the Nawab of Bhopal and Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes in November 1946.¹³⁷ Bhopal's assessment must be viewed critically given his own close association with the Muslim League and increasingly rigid Muslim communal-political viewpoint. Nonetheless, it points to the disintegration of the princely order. Two months later, the Nawab of Rampur, a Muslim ruler with Congress sympathies, warned the princes "were dividing off into communal groups."¹³⁸

Ironically, Bhopal's efforts to form a confederation of princely states were undercut by the actions of his ally and advisor M.A. Jinnah. Whilst some Hindu princes were willing to consider accession to Pakistan, the League's refusal to enter the Constituent Assembly and insistence on a sovereign Muslim state excited the Indian and Hindu nationalist sensibilities of other rulers.¹³⁹ Moreover, it dashed any hope of forging an enduring, all-India, anti-Congress bloc between the Muslim political elite and the princely order—the strategic alliance the British had banked on in designing the abortive 1935 Federation.

¹³⁶ Copland argues the most important short-term factor in the collapse of the Princely Order was "the failure of the rulers to stick together." See *The Princes of India*, 233.

¹³⁷ Bhopal to Corfield, 23 November 1946, *TOP*, 9: 156-57.

¹³⁸ Wylie to Wavell, 7 February 1947, *TOP*, 9: 640.

¹³⁹ Copland, *The Princes of India*, 240-241.

In response to the June 3rd settlement, several of the larger princely states, including Travancore, Hyderabad and Kashmir, indicated they would declare independence on the lapse of British sovereignty. The Muslim League gave these states its support, repeatedly declaring that with the end of British rule the princes would be free to chart their states' respective destinies.¹⁴⁰ At the same time, Bhopal worked with Jinnah to draw a group of Rajasthani and Central Indian states into Pakistan. To the ruler of Jodhpur, whose state bordered Sind and if joined to Pakistan would have provided a gateway to other anti-Congress states, Jinnah is reputed to have handed a fountain pen saying that whatever he wrote would constitute Jodhpur's terms of accession to Pakistan.¹⁴¹ Only at the last-minute and due to vigorous Vice-regal and Congress intervention did these machinations fail.¹⁴²

Like the League, the Hindu Mahasabha was deeply implicated in the princes' attempts to resist democraticization and the integration of their realms into independent India. During the final months of the *Raj* and the first half-year of Indian independence, the Mahasabhites sought to realize their longstanding goal of a Mahasabha-princely alliance to fight Pakistan, the Congress, and worker-peasant militancy. They implored the princes to join forces with their party in a Hindu National Front. "Our only hope," wrote the Mahasabha General Secretary to the *Dewan* of Travancore, "lies in co-ordinating all the Hindu forces of which Hindu Princes form an invaluable link, just as the Congress is entrenching its position by allying itself with the Leftist Parties."¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ *Leader*, 20 and 27 June and 1 August, 1947; "Extract from India News," *TOP*, 12: 128.

¹⁴¹ "Viceroy's Personal Report, No. 16," "Memorandum" of Mountbatten, and "Viceroy's Personal Report, No. 17," *TOP*, 12: 603, 660-661, and 767.

¹⁴² Copland, *The Princes of India*, 255-60; "Viceroy's Personal Report, No. 17," *TOP*, 12: 767.

¹⁴³ Ashutosh Lahiry to Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar, undated, Asutosh Lahiry Papers.

The shifting political affinities of the Alwar *darbar* exemplify that the Mahasabha was competing with the League for Princely support and that its Hindu National Front was an alternative program to Pakistan for fighting the Congress and the left. A politically influential north-west Indian state, Alwar was allied with Bhopal till April 1947 and its Hindu maharaj was among those rulers who pondered taking his state into Pakistan.¹⁴⁴ Then, under the influence of a new *Dewan*—the Mahasabhite supporter N.B. Khare—and mounting unrest among the state's principal Muslim community, Alwar switched gears, taking a leadership role in the organization of the Hindu National Front and fomenting mass communal violence in the name of fighting Pakistan.¹⁴⁵

Responding to the *Dewan* of Travancore's suggestion that the Mahasabha might not be a worthy ally given its weakness and repeated shifts in policy, Ashutosh Lahiry insisted that the Mahasabha had been steadfast in its support of the Hindu princes. Moreover, the princes themselves bore some of the responsibility for the Mahasabha's difficulties, since many of them had spurned it in pursuit of good relations with the party of Gandhi, Nehru and Patel.

At various stages, the Hindu Mahasabha ha[s] openly and unambiguously taken the side of the States as against the Congress and its policy to bolster up troubles against the Hindu States and weaken their strength. The correctness of my assertion can be easily verified by a reference to the various resolutions passed at the open Session of the Hindu Mahasabha, and by its Working Committee during the last ten years. I can specifically mention the instance of Kashmere [sic]. At every stage the Hindu

¹⁴⁴ N.B. Khare, *My Political Memoirs or Autobiography* (Nagpur: J.R. Joshi, 1959) 296-302; Copland, *The Princes of India*, 245.

¹⁴⁵ The role that the Maharaja of Alwar and his Dewan, Khare, played in the Hindu National Front and inciting communal violence is discussed below.

The Central Indian state of Indore is also illustrative of a Mahasabha-League rivalry for Princely support. The Maharaja of Indore had previously boasted of his patronage of the Mahasabha, but because of his close friendship with the Nawab of Bhopal and their states' proximity, he was Bhopal's staunchest princely supporter in 1947. See Copland, *The Princes of India*, 206, n. #83; Indore to Mountbatten, 31 July 1947, *TOP*, 12: 434-35.

Mahasabha had given the state its open and unequivocal support, and condemned the action of Pandit Nehru and the Congress leaders.

Yet the Maharaja of Kashmir, like most other princes, had been “afraid to lend any support to the Mahasabha, lest it should alienate the sympathies of the Congress leaders.”¹⁴⁶

Princely State Secession and *Akhand Hindustan*

Travancore was, arguably, the first state to declare for independence.¹⁴⁷ At a June 11 press conference, its *Dewan*, Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar, claimed that the transfer of power agreement’s dashing of the historic goal of a united India compelled Travancore to give primacy to its own interests. That partition was little more than a pretext was underscored when Aiyar subsequently gave a second reason for resisting integration with the Indian Union—its establishment of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union would make India a center of Communist subversion.¹⁴⁸

The Hindu Mahasabhis had long claimed to be the foremost advocates of *Akhand Hindusthan* and, as we saw, on June 9 adopted a resolution vowing the subcontinent would never know peace till the Hindu nation was unified in a single state. Yet they hailed Travancore’s independence bid. “I strongly support the Maharaj’s and your far-sighted and courageous determination to declare the independence of our Hindu

¹⁴⁶ Ashutosh Lahiry to Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar, undated, Ashutosh Lahiry Papers.

¹⁴⁷ Because of its autocratic form of government, exactly when Travancore opted for independence is unclear. On March 15, 1947 Dewan Aiyar had said the state would become independent with the end of British rule and provided a lengthy legal-historical justification for Travancore independence. On June 6, he reaffirmed Travancore’s intention to stand outside both the Indian Union and Pakistan, and on June 11—one day before the Nizam issued a *firman* proclaiming that Hyderabad would become independent August 15—Aiyar told a press conference that the Maharaja was resolved Travancore would revert to independence following the lapse of British paramountcy and was ready to meet “any risk” in this “life and death” endeavour. See Ouwerkerk, 252-53 and 256; *Leader*, 7 and 14 June, 1947; Copland, *The Princes of India*, 253.

¹⁴⁸ Ouwerkerk, 256; “Telegram from the Dewan of Travancore to the Prime Minister Dated 6th July,” *TOP*, 12: 154.

State of Travancore,” Savarkar telegraphed *Dewan Aiyar*. “Yours is probably the only State which has taken a bold stand against the Congress,” wrote Bhopatkar. “[A]t Madras I supported you in the clearest possible terms.”¹⁴⁹

Neither the Hyderabad *darbar*’s June 12 declaration that it too was preparing “to resume the status of an independent sovereign state,” nor Travancore’s effort to solicit the backing of Pakistan’s government-to-be in any conflict with the Indian Union caused the Mahasabhites to draw back.¹⁵⁰ On the contrary, in face-to-face meetings and by correspondence they appealed to *Dewan Aiyar* for “close” and “effective co-operation,” making certain to stress the Mahasabha’s credentials as an opponent of the Travancore’s *darbar*’s principal enemies:

... with regard to the broad issues in which we are all united, I may say that the Hindu Mahasabha has been all along the most outspoken opponent of Gandhism, as well as of Communism ...¹⁵¹

Previously the Mahasabhites had urged the Princely states to take up the seats allotted them in the Constituent Assembly with the dual objective of strengthening India against the campaign for Pakistan and slowing the INC’s push for bourgeois-democratic reform.¹⁵² Now they made increasingly urgent appeals for at least some states to stay outside the Constituent Assembly.

Maharashtran pride in the large number of Mahratta-ruled states had long played a role in the Mahasabhites’ enthusiasm for princely India. But Mahasabha President

¹⁴⁹ *Mahratta*, 20 June 1947; L.B. Bhopatkar to C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar, 7 July 1947, Asutosh Lahiry Papers, File A-1; Bhim Sen to General Secretary All-India Hindu Mahasabha, 22 June 1947 and Asutosh Lahiry to Bhim Sen, 26 June 1947, HMS M-20.

¹⁵⁰ *Leader*, 14 and 27 June 1947; “Viceroy’s Personal Report No. 14,” *TOP*, 12: 336.

¹⁵¹ Ashutosh Lahiry to Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar, undated, Ashutosh Lahiry Papers.

¹⁵² The Congress leadership had agreed the Princes would be free to select whomever they wished to fill half of the states’ Constituent Assembly seats. The other half were to be chosen by the states’ non-representative legislatures or, in the absence of these, by electoral colleges comprised of business and other civic associations (S.K. Ghosh, *India and the Raj*, Vol. 2, 305-6; Copland, *The Princes of India*, 244).

Bhopatkar took this to a qualitatively new level with repeated calls in June and July 1947 for a new Maratha Confederacy. In harking back to the period two centuries before when the Marathas waged war on the Mogul empire, Bhopatkar interwove the Mahasabha's principal themes—resistance to Congress rule and the need for violent opposition to Pakistan. In a lead article in the *Mahratta* titled “Revive the Maratha Confederacy,” Bhopatkar condemned the Congress for “threatening” the Deccan states with “dire consequences” if they stood aloof from the Constituent Assembly:

In such circumstances, will it be wise on the part of the Hindu and Sikh States to cast in their lot with the Congress in haste and then repent at leisure, when they are victimized to appease the Moslems? Instead, will it not be safer for them to form their own Unions and to wait till the Congress exhibits a saner mood?¹⁵³

Like the Kashmir *darbar*, the Mahasabhites were divided over how best to counter the League's campaign to corral the *Raj*'s largest Muslim-majority Princely state into Pakistan. Some held that the privileges of the state's mainly Hindu Dogra elite would be best defended if Kashmir joined the India Union. Others argued for Kashmir independence. In a July 9 statement, Savarkar said that it would be “suicidal” to “subject the freedom of large Hindu States” to India's “anti-Hindu” government and urged “the Maharaja and his indomitable Dewan Pandit Kak” to “forthwith declare” Kashmir independence. Ultimately, the Mahasabhites rallied round a position of supporting the Maharaja in his choice of when and whether Kashmir should accede to India.¹⁵⁴

In a lengthy letter to Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar, Ashutosh Lahiry attempted to square the Mahasabha's previous stand with its support for Travancore independence and appeals for other states to use the threat of non-accession to change Indian Union policy.

¹⁵³ *Mahratta*, 4 July 1947; Indra Prakash, *Dharmavir Bhopatkar*, (New Delhi: Hindu Mission Bhandar) 145-46.

¹⁵⁴ *Mahratta*, 11 July 1947; Balraj Puri, “Dogra, Prem Nath,” *Dictionary of National Biography*.

The Mahasabha could not “commit itself to a policy of unrestricted and unqualified independence in respect of each and every State.” But it was in the interests of the Hindus to keep several of the larger states outside the Indian Union with a view to a future power struggle. Significantly, Lahiry painted this struggle in military tones: “[W]e believe it is the interest of the Hindus that we should have some independent units of Hindu strength which, if and when necessity arises, may be in a position to fight out our battle.”¹⁵⁵

The Congress High Command viewed Travancore’s independence bid as a grave threat. Not only was Travancore a large, coastal state with highly developed port facilities; it was a source of minerals crucial to armaments manufacture, including the making of nuclear weapons—minerals Britain and the US were anxious to ensure remained in the hands of a friendly government.¹⁵⁶ But Aiyar’s boasts of Travancore’s readiness to withstand an Indian blockade and Congress and Communist dissidence proved empty. With the state increasingly beset by unrest, a Congress Direct Action campaign slated to begin in a few days, and the *Dewan* the target of an assassination attempt, the Maharaja of Travancore wired Mountbatten, July 26, that his state was joining the Indian Union.¹⁵⁷

Fighting for Hindu *Raj*: Ethnic-Cleansing and the Hindu Princes’ & People’s Front

Earlier in July, when Travancore was still raising the standard of revolt against the Congress-led Indian Union, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Working Committee of the All-India Kshatriya Mahasabha initiated a campaign for a Hindu National Convention with the aim of broadening and formalizing the Mahasabha-princely alliance. At least

¹⁵⁵ Ashutosh Lahiry to Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar, undated, Ashutosh Lahiry Papers.

¹⁵⁶ A. Martin Wainwright, *Inheritance of Empire: Britain, India and the Balance of Power in Asia, 1938-55* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1994) 53 and 100.

¹⁵⁷ *Leader*, 30 June 1947; Ouwerkerk, 260-273; “Viceroy’s Personal Report No. 15,” *TOP*, 12: 453.

three separate appeals for the Convention were issued: one by the Mahasabha's principal leaders, including S.P. Mookerjee, and longstanding Hindu communal-political allies like J.K. Birla and the Punjab Sanatan Dharma leader Goswami Dutt; a second by the *Dewan* of Alwar, N.B. Khare; and a third by supportive princes and Chiefs. Seth Ram Krishna Dalmia, one of India's leading industrialists and financiers, meanwhile agreed to preside over and no doubt bankroll a conference of the Anti-Cow Slaughter Sangh to be held in conjunction with the Hindu Convention.¹⁵⁸

Khare's appeal called for the Hindu "princes and people" to come together in a United Hindu National Front and transform the Indian Union into a Hindu Rashtra with a constitution limiting Muslims' citizenship rights. "The Congress government," Khare asserted, "must be made either to yield to these demands or to quit and make place for those who represent the real wishes of the Hindus. For this, obviously, the Hindu Mahasabha must be strengthened by infusing new blood into it."¹⁵⁹

A letter warning of a "possible large-scale internal struggle" and urging princely participation in the Hindu National Convention was issued under the signatures of the Maharajas of Gwalior, Alwar, Bharatpur, and Panna and the Rajas of Faridkot and Bhagat. "There is," the letter affirmed, "a clear indication that the Indian people are in need of fresh leadership and it is time for the Princely Order to take advantage of this golden opportunity ..."¹⁶⁰

For reasons that will be discussed below, neither Khare, who had assumed the Presidency of the Hindu National Front, nor the Maharaja of Alwar, who was supposed to

¹⁵⁸ Syed Azhar Husain Zaidi, *The New Nazis* (Karachi: Ferozsons, undated) 31-32; *Mahratta*, 25 July and 8 and 15 August 1947; Khare, *My Political Memoirs*, 320-22

¹⁵⁹ Reproduced in Khare, *My Political Memoirs*, 320-22.

¹⁶⁰ Zaidi, *The New Nazis*, 31-32.

inaugurate the opening session, attended the Hindu National Convention held in New Delhi August 9-10. In Khare's stead, Savarkar gave the main address. An Alwar minister read a statement from the Maharaja that stressed the "need of discarding Western system of Government" and reviving the *Kshatriya* martial tradition.¹⁶¹ The main resolution rejected the June 3rd settlement and urged that India be "developed as a Hindu Rashtra" to facilitate Hindusthan's speedy re-union. It called on Hindus to prepare "popular sanctions" to compel the Government of India to abolish Urdu as an official language, prohibit cow-killing, raise a national militia, and adopt a constitution empowering the state to "discriminate against the Musalmans."¹⁶²

Whilst the Convention heard ringing denunciations of Pakistan and Muslim treachery, its principal purpose was frankly stated by Mauli Chand Sharma—a former *Dewan* and Chamber of Princes functionary, a future president of the Jana Sangh, and the General Secretary of the Hindu National Front—to "propagate against the Congress, Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru."¹⁶³

To the extent that the Convention succeeded in rallying princely support it tended to be from among the petty and less politically influential rulers. The princes of Bharatpur, Faridkot and Mandi were prominent in the Convention's deliberations but the Maharajas of Gwalior and Alwar were conspicuously absent.¹⁶⁴

Around the same time that the Maharaja of Gwalior had endorsed the Convention appeal, he had arranged for his state's four seats in the Constituent Assembly to be filled. To the Mahasbhites' dismay, Gwalior's Constituent Assembly delegates included two

¹⁶¹ *Mahratta*, 15 August 1947; *Leader*, 11 August 1947.

¹⁶² Khare, *My Political Memoirs*, 320-22.

¹⁶³ Cited in Zaidi, *The New Nazis*, 30-31; Bruce Graham, *Hindu Nationalism*, 57-58.

¹⁶⁴ Jaffrelet, *Dissertation*, 492.

Congress nominees and no votaries of *Hindutva*. The state Hindu Sabha responded by announcing plans for a Direct Action campaign aimed at ending Muslim “privileges.” In the midst of such a clash it is hardly surprising the most important Maratha prince absented himself from the Mahasabha-led Hindu National Convention. But the Maharaja of Gwalior went considerably further in disassociating himself from the Mahasabhites. He demonstratively identified himself with India’s new political order, announcing the establishment of a constitutional reform committee on 15 August 1947—Independence Day.¹⁶⁵

If Gwalior’s vacillating politics pointed to the difficulties the Mahasabha had in convincing princes sympathetic to its cause that a viable right-wing opposition to Congress rule could be organized, the absence of the Alwar sponsors of the Hindu National Convention underscored the dangers inherent in any attempt to implement the Mahasabha’s Hindu supremacist program. To be blunt, Khare and the Maharaja of Alwar had plunged their state into civil war by pursuing a campaign of communal violence and vengeance against their state’s large Meo population.

The communal situation in Alwar was highly combustible. The state had been swamped by Hindu and Sikh refugees from the Punjab and by Meos fleeing Bharatpur, where the *darbar* had supported and instigated mass anti-Muslim violence. The Meos, meanwhile, had launched an agitation that in the name of creating a Meo-dominated province of Mewat challenged the traditional feudal economic and political structures of north-west India. The Meo “rebellion” and the extent to which it was animated by a religious-communal political consciousness continue to generate much debate. There is, however, incontrovertible evidence to show that the Meo agitation was distinct from and

¹⁶⁵ *Leader*, 6 and 25 July, and 29 August 1947; Copland, *The Princes of India*, 263.

opposed to the League's agitation for Pakistan.¹⁶⁶ Indeed, had the Alwar Rajya Praja Mandal not brought a quick end in the summer of 1946 to a popular challenge to the Alwar *darbar*, as part of the INC's new, more conciliatory policy toward the princely order, it is possible the Meo agitation would have developed on very different lines.¹⁶⁷

In any event, rather than seeking to douse the developing communal and caste confrontation, the Alwar and Bharatpur *darbars*, and their Hindu Mahasabha, RSS, and Jat Mahasabha allies, effectively poured gasoline on it. The Meos were doubly damned—damned as Muslims, although prior to the late 19th century invasion of census takers they had not so identified themselves, and as protagonists of Pakistan, although theirs was not a movement for Pakistan.¹⁶⁸ The Alwar elite was eager to avenge a 1932-33 Meo campaign against high land taxes and the state's land enclosure policy that had resulted in the British deposing the Maharaja and effectively administering the state for a decade.¹⁶⁹ For the Hindu nationalists, the communal strife was an opportunity to vent their frustrations at the ceding of Pakistan and their marginal role in all-India politics. No doubt the prospect of material gain through pillage and the seizure of Muslim property was also a major factor.

The Hindu Mahasabha had become a conspicuous and significant force in Alwar in the years following the end of British trusteeship over the state's affairs.¹⁷⁰ After Khare became *Dewan* in April 1947, the *darbar*'s support for the Mahasabha and RSS greatly

¹⁶⁶ Shail Mayaram, *Resisting Regimes: Myth, Memory and the Shaping of Muslim Identity*, (Delhi: OUP, 1997) 11, and Chapter 6, especially, 169-70 and 174-75; Ian Copland, "The Further Shores of Partition: Ethnic Cleansing in Rajasthan," *Past and Present*, No. 160 (1998), 230-31.

¹⁶⁷ *People's Age*, 27 October 1947; Copland, "Ethnic Cleansing in Rajasthan," 231.

¹⁶⁸ Mayaram, 4.

¹⁶⁹ Copland, "Ethnic Cleansing in Rajasthan," 222-23. On the 1932-33 Meo agitation see Mayaram, Chapters 3-5 and Ian Copland, "Islam and the 'Moral Economy': The Alwar Revolt of 1932." *South Asia*, Vol. XXII (1999): 109-132.

¹⁷⁰ Mayaram, 171; Copland, "Ethnic Cleansing in Rajasthan," 228-229.

expanded. Mahasabha leaders visited Alwar at government expense and Khare and other ministers addressed Hindu Sabha functions.¹⁷¹

Between June and late July 1947 a state-supported campaign of violence against the Meos escalated into an all-out drive to rid Alwar of its Muslim population—through forced conversions, terror-induced flight, and annihilation. Villages were razed, mosques desecrated, and government buildings, including reputedly the Maharaja's old palace, transformed into conversion centers.¹⁷² Khare would later boast that during 1947-48, Alwar "became non-Muslim." This was only a slight exaggeration. The 1951 census recorded the state's Muslim population at about 6 percent—and this was after a major resettlement effort—as compared with 27 percent in 1941.¹⁷³

Khare also acted as an advisor to the Bharatpur *darbar*, which was no less implicated in the anti-Meo violence than that of Alwar.¹⁷⁴ A Government of India report drafted with the object of initiating action against the Maharaja of Bharatpur for his role in the terror campaign against the Meos termed him "a determined patron of the Hindu Mahasabha movement and the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh [and] a great advocate of the movement to raise a strong Hindu militia ... " His aim was to establish the "domination of Hindus in India."¹⁷⁵ The British Indian CID accused Bharatpur's brother of personally leading raids on Meo villages. "It is," says a historian who has studied the events in Alwar and Bharatpur, "hard to resist the conclusion, that this was a blatant

¹⁷¹ J.L. Kapur, *Gandhi Murder Inquiry*, Part 1, 243-44.

¹⁷² Copland, "Ethnic Cleansing in Rajasthan, 215; Zaidi, *The New Nazis*, 32.

¹⁷³ Copland, "Ethnic Cleansing in Rajasthan, 215-16.

¹⁷⁴ Mayaram 192; Copland, "Ethnic Cleansing in Rajasthan," 233.

¹⁷⁵ Cited in Mayaram, 172.

attempt at ethnic cleansing masterminded by Khare and his friends in the Hindu Mahasabha.”¹⁷⁶

The anti-Meo pogrom encountered furious resistance. Two days after the conclusion of the Hindu National Convention, ten thousand Meos fought a pitched battle against Alwar’s armed forces and troops from several nearby states whose Sikh or Hindu rulers were complicit in the anti-Meo offensive.¹⁷⁷

How many Meos were killed in the spring and summer of 1947 is a matter of conjecture, but the death toll was certainly in the tens of thousands. One estimate put the dead in Bharatpur alone at 30,000.¹⁷⁸ Moreover, Alwar and Bharatpur were not the only princely sponsors of the Mahasabha’s Hindu National Front to be implicated in mass communal violence. In the summer of 1947, the aforementioned Raja of Faridkot “expelled all the Muslims from his State,” and “confiscated their land and made it into Crown property.”¹⁷⁹

The twelve months between the Great Calcutta Killing of mid-August 1946 and the birth of the Dominions of India and Pakistan saw the Mahasabha re-emerge on the all-India political stage. A Mahasabhite was even named to the maiden cabinet of independent India. But the events in UP and Alwar in August 1947 demonstrated that the revived Mahasabha was a highly flammable mix of Hindu nationalist ideologues and elite elements—most of them drawn from India’s aristocratic orders—conspicuous for their vehement opposition to democratic and socio-economic reform. These events also underscored that the Mahasabhites’ ambitions generally exceeded their reach.

¹⁷⁶ Copland, “Ethnic Cleansing in Rajasthan,” 235.

¹⁷⁷ Khare, *My Political Memoirs*, 325; Copland, “Ethnic Cleansing in Rajasthan,” 234; Zaidi, *The New Nazis*, 32.

¹⁷⁸ Mayaram, 192.

¹⁷⁹ “Lord Ismay’s Note on Interview with Nehru,” *J. Nehru Selected Works*, V. 4, Second Series, 244.

Chapter 8: The Hindu Mahasabha and India's new political order, Part Two—Communal Fury, the Gandhi Assassination and the Shattering of the Mahasabha

The partition of British India into the Dominions of India and Pakistan provoked a violent upheaval in north-western South Asia that ranks among the greatest tragedies of the Twentieth Century. Estimates of the dead range from 200,000 to 2 million. Another ten to twelve million people were rendered refugees.¹ By March 1948, massacres, flight, and forced conversions had reduced the non-Muslim population of West Pakistan to less than 5 percent. Parts of north-western India saw terror-induced communal population shifts—what the late 20th century would dub ethnic-cleansing—of a like kind. Delhi, for centuries the capital of Muslim culture in South Asia, saw its Muslim population fall by more than 200,000 or two-thirds.² In a September 1947 statement, Master Tara Singh, among the chief instigators, if not principal organizers, of the anti-Muslim violence, conceded, “our brethren Sikhs and Hindus have . . . been guilty of most shameful attacks upon women and children.” He urged Hindus and Sikhs to cease attacking “refuge trains, convoys and caravans . . . in the interests of your own community’s reputation, character and tradition, and not to save the Muslims.”³

Like other Indians, the Hindu Mahasabha members were shocked and incensed by the scale of the savagery and suffering. But the partition violence left them of two minds, for they saw it as vindication of their warnings as to the perfidy of the Muslims and, in as

¹ The conservative death estimate is Hodson’s (418). Mushirul Hasan, “Partition: The Human Cost,” *History Today*, September 1997: 103.

² Muslim flight and the influx of Hindus and Sikhs from the western Punjab caused an historic shift in the make-up of Delhi’s population. Whereas in 1941, Muslims had comprised a third of the total population of Delhi Province, in 1951 they comprised just 5.7 percent. See Mushirul Hasan, *Legacy of a Divided Nation: India’s Muslims since Independence*, Delhi: OUP, 1997, 173.)

³ Statement of Master Tara Singh and Udham Singh Nagoke, [24?] September 1947, *Jinnah Papers*, First Series, 5: 517.

much as large numbers of Hindus and Sikhs were exacting communal retribution and revenge on the Muslim enemy, as heralding a Hindu national resurgence.

A few cases such as Alwar excepted, the specific role played by Mahasabhite leaders and the Mahasabha-led Hindusthan National Guards in the communal holocaust is impossible to establish. As the violence assumed a popular character, traditional divisions between parties and organizations dissolved. In the worst effected areas “mass participation” was almost invariably facilitated and encouraged by sections of the police and army and by elements in India’s Congress-led provincial and Union governments.⁴ It in no way detracts from the guilt of the Mahasabhites and RSS to observe that the Congress and state authorities had an interest in exaggerating the role *Hindutva*-ites played in the violence, the better to cover up their own complicity.

Whilst the tumult of the times and the still-sealed police and government files do not allow us to disentangle the Mahasabhite contribution to the communal violence, the historical record is unequivocal about one thing: the Hindu Mahasabhites and their RSS allies were the most consistent and forthright in providing a political/ideological justification for attacking Muslims. As we saw in our discussion of the Mahasabha’s Gorakhpur session, already by late 1946 leading Mahasabhites were calling for illegalising Islam and expelling India’s Muslim minority. In the aftermath of partition their calls became even more bloodcurdling. Prominent Mahasabhites rationalized the pogroms against Muslims in north-western India as acts of self-defence, made all the more necessary because “ministers of the Indian State were literally feasting and fiddling” while the Pakistan government and the Muslims of Delhi plotted the seizure of

⁴ For some evidence of this, see the confidential report of a US Embassy official, Howard Donovan to George Marshall, 18 September 1947, *Jinnah Papers*, First Series, 5: 511-15. Also of interest is Walter K. Andersen and S. Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron*, 48-49 and 67, n. 115.

India's capital. "Under these circumstances," exclaimed Savarkar, "what wonder is there that millions of Hindu-Sikhs prompted by the instinct of self-preservation and animated by the spirit of pan-Hindu consolidation rose in arms in East Punjab, in Bharatpur, in Alwar, in Patiala and in Delhi itself . . ."⁵

Meeting in mid-September 1947, the Mahasabha Working Committee called for the "wholesale exchange of population" on communal lines between East and West Punjab and for "the same policy [to] be pursued to cover ultimately the whole of Hindusthan and Pakistan."⁶ For its part, the Mahasabha-aligned Hindu National Front said Muslims who did not migrate to Pakistan should be "dis-enfranchised statutorily for a period of 20 years" and barred from serving in the police and armed forces, Foreign and Political services and holding "key positions in" all other government departments.⁷

Savarkar, though plagued by ill health, was particularly conspicuous in seeking to instigate both popular and state action against the Muslims. India's Muslims, he insisted, were "bound to rise in revolt simultaneously with [a Pakistani] invasion from outside." If the Gandhian Congress remained at the helm of the Indian state, it would soon be converted by "Moslem conquest into an Akhand Pakistan."⁸

The more "moderate" Bengal Hindu Sabha was divided over whether to exhort the Indian state to hold the Muslims of West Bengal accountable for the treatment of the Hindu minority in East Pakistan—i.e. to use them as hostages in a communal eye-for-an-eye policy—or to press for the exodus of the entire 13 million-strong Hindu population of East Bengal. This, it should be noted, was under conditions where, apart from

⁵ *Mahratta*, 3 October 1947.

⁶ *Mahratta*, 26 September 1947.

⁷ *Mahratta*, 12 December 1947.

⁸ *Mahratta*, 3 October 1947 and *Savarkar Writings*, 557.

disturbances in Calcutta in late August 1947—disturbances that many charged the Mahasabha had instigated—the now divided Bengal had largely been free of communal violence.⁹

As a member of the Union Cabinet S.P. Mookerjee faced special constraints on his actions and public utterances. But if he did not join with Savarkar in calling for “all Hindus in East Bengal” to come over to India “and at least an equal number of Muslims” to be “sent to Eastern Bengal if necessary per force,” it was because he was convinced that the mutual hostages policy would suffice. According to his biographer and one-time secretary Balraj Madhok, Mookerjee later regretted not having urged the east Bengal Hindus to emigrate at the founding of Pakistan.¹⁰

Through January 1948, Mookerjee continued to publicly identify himself with the Mahasabha and to collaborate with Savarkar and the most extreme Hindu supremacists. Whilst Mookerjee believed the Mahasabha needed to reorient itself in light of the new situation produced by the British departure and the communal partition of the subcontinent, he still hoped to make the Mahasabha the cornerstone of a vibrant right-wing alternative to the Congress. When Nehru demanded he explain a report that he was flying the Hindu Mahasabha standard instead of the newly adopted national flag at his Delhi residence, the Industry Minister said that the national flag had flown over his house since August 15, but the Mahasabha’s *Bhagwa Jhanda* also flew from time to time.¹¹

Replying on Mookerjee’s behalf to a letter critical of Mahasabha policy, party General-Secretary Ashutosh Lahiry defended the conduct of the RSS and explicitly called

⁹ Pyarelal, *The Last Phase*, V. 2, 404 and 411-12.

¹⁰ Savarkar to N.C. Chatterjee, 28 December 1947, *Savarkar Writings*, 562; Balraj Madhok, *Portrait of a Martyr*, 76–77 and 81-90.

¹¹ Nehru to S.P. Mookerjee, 28 September 1947, *SWJN*, 2nd Series, V. 4, 506-507 and fn. #4, 507.

for all Muslims to be expelled from India: "Now that they have got their long-cherished dream, the Muslims now staying in Hindusthan must be made to leave Hindusthan for . . . [they] will certainly prove to be traitors, saboteurs and fifth-columnists. . . . The only salvation for India lies in developing Hindusthan State into a real Hindu Rastra [*sic*]." ¹²

Initially, the Mahasabhites found it difficult to challenge the authority of the Congress and Gandhi. In a letter assessing the poor turnout for the Mahasabha's 31 August "Punjab Mourning Day," Lahiry complained that the Hindu masses continue to give "whole-hearted support to the Congress." ¹³ Almost contemporaneously, Mookerjee and the Bengal Hindu Sabha bowed to Gandhi's threat to fast unto the death unless they joined with the much-loathed Suhrawardy and the Muslim League to halt all communal violence in India's largest metropolis. Mookerjee and Bengal Hindu Sabha President N.C. Chatterjee even placed the Calcutta units of the Hindusthan National Guard at the Mahatma's disposal. ¹⁴

But during the fall of 1947 the Mahasabhites and their RSS allies became increasingly defiant. The support they drew from the traumatized and desperate millions-strong Hindu-Sikh refugee population was one reason. Another was the surge in sympathy for Hindu communalist views in Congress and government circles. According to Bombay Premier B.G. Kher "[M]any Congressmen got affected by the communal virus." ¹⁵ Three-quarters of all Congress workers were "influenced by the ideology of Hindu Mahasabha" conceded UP PCC President Damodar Swarup. ¹⁶ By January 1948,

¹² Ashutosh Lahiry to Ramlakhan Prasad Sinha, 15 December 1947, HMS P-111.

¹³ *Gandhi Murder Inquiry*, Part II, 51; Lahiry to the Secretary of the Alwar Hindu Sabha, 2 September 1947, as cited in Jaffrelot, *Dissertation*, 511.

¹⁴ Pyarelal, *The Last Phase*, V. 2, 405-06 and 412-415.

¹⁵ Cited in Mahajan, *Independence and Partition*, 322.

¹⁶ *Leader*, 12 January 1948.

the Mahasabha and RSS were mobilizing large refugee crowds and with anti- Congress and anti-Gandhi slogans, not just Muslim-baiting.

In a context also marked by a serious economic crisis and mounting worker-peasant militancy, the *Hindutva*-ites seemed to be emerging as a pole of opposition to India's embattled Congress-led government. This was exemplified by a rally of 50,000 RSS cadres and supporters held in the Indian capital in December 1947 which brought together on its platform the veteran Mahasabhite and Punjab refugee leader G.C. Narang, J.K. Birla, the Maharajas of Alwar and Idar, and RSS supremo M.S. Golwalkar.¹⁷ Nehru certainly perceived a threat to his government from this direction. From late September 1947, he repeatedly warned of an attempt by what he termed fascist elements "to overturn the Government, or at least break up its present character."¹⁸

Because 15 August 1947 has served as either the end- or starting-point of most scholarly studies of Twentieth Century Indian politics and history, the period immediately following the division of British India into the rival states of India and Pakistan has been little studied. To be sure, reference is made to the communal massacres and exchanges of population, the conflict over Kashmir, and the assassination of Gandhi. But the volatility of popular sentiment, the precarious economic situation, and the deep fissures in the Congress are often overlooked.

If today it seems outlandish to suggest that the Congress government could have foundered under the combined impact of communal strife and leftist-supported socio-economic discontent, contemporaries saw it differently. According to V.P. Menon, a senior civil servant and Patel confidante, had the Indian government not acted decisively

¹⁷ *Gandhi Murder Inquiry*, Part 2, 66.

¹⁸ J. Nehru to Vallabhbhai Patel, 30 September 1947, *SWJN*, Second Series, 4: 114. See also 453, 456 and 461.

in September 1947 to quell the communal disturbances in Delhi and the East Punjab “the consequences would have brought down the Government itself.”¹⁹ Being widely held, this perception of a government in disarray and at risk of being swept away influenced the course of events.

I: Contenders for Power? The *Hindutva*-ites on the Offensive

In the last four and a half months of 1947, the *Hindutva*-ites focused their energy and resources on the refugees from Pakistan—assisting their evacuation, providing them relief, articulating demands on their behalf, and inciting them to drive the Muslims from India and seize the dwellings and businesses of those who had already fled. To the *Hindutva*-ites the refugees from Pakistan personified the justness of their cause. This affinity grew stronger still as the refugees, who were communally radicalized by the partition trauma, proved receptive to their venomous anti-Muslim propaganda and denunciations of Congress calumny. No occasion was lost to remind the refugees that the Congress had pledged during the 1945-46 election campaign to resolutely oppose Pakistan, then, when accepting the June 3rd partition agreement, had insisted that any Hindus and Sikhs whose homes fell within Pakistan would be safe.

Aid to real and alleged victims of Muslim communal violence had long been a Mahasabha preoccupation. But the contribution that the force of circumstance made to pushing the *Hindutva*-ites' into the leadership of refugee relief should not be ignored. Because public administration had been thrown into disarray by the transfer of power and partition, and because the Congress-led government was focussed on suppressing mass

¹⁹ V.P. Menon, *The Transfer of Power*, 434 and also 423.

communal violence, averting an economic collapse, and constraining socio-economic unrest, care for the Hindu-Sikh refugees fell largely to private initiative.

Beginning in the spring of 1947, the Mahasabha's extensive New Delhi property was transformed into a refugee camp as Hindus uprooted from the Punjab and NWFP sought shelter and sustenance. In July the Mahasabhites founded a Central Hindu Reclamation Board. By the end of August, the Hindutvites were operating or sharing in the operation of four refugee camps in Delhi, as well as a soup-kitchen named for the Mahasabha President, the Bhopatkar Canteen. By contrast, only in the fall did the newly-established Ministry of Rehabilitation establish three government-run refugee camps in India's capital.²⁰

The growing dimensions of the refugee problem are reflected in the form that those seeking the Mahasabha's help were asked to complete. From a humble handwritten sheet it became a mimeographed form, then a lengthy questionnaire. Tragically, the demand for forms quickly exhausted the Central Hindu Reclamation Board's supply.²¹

The *Hindutva*-ites soon recognized the political opportunity that the refugee crisis afforded them. They were able to tap into a deep well of public sympathy for the suffering refugees, who, in turn, provided a stream of new recruits for the Hindusthan National Guards and the RSS. Taking advantage of the disarray in Congress and government circles, the *Hindutva*-ites insinuated themselves into leadership positions in both the ad hoc bodies founded by the refugees and the government refugee relief operation. A banking and sugar magnate, as well as a former Punjab minister, the veteran

²⁰ Jaffrelot, Dissertation, 508.

²¹ HMS, M-9 and P-107.

Mahasabhite G.C. Narang never needed to spend a single night in a refugee camp, yet he quickly emerged as a prominent refugee spokesman.²² Ramnath Kalia, a member of the All-India Mahasabha Working Committee, was named a Special Magistrate during the partition violence and subsequently served on various government committees relating to refugee relief and rehabilitation.²³ Many in government and Congress circles, it need be added, were eager to draw on the *Hindutva*-ites' services. On the recommendation of top Punjab Congress leaders, Patel named the chief RSS *sanchalak* in the Punjab, *Rai Bahadur* Badri Das, as acting Governor of the East Punjab.²⁴

The Congress government thus soon found itself in the anomalous position of simultaneously trying to prevent refugees from acting on the *Hindutva*-ites' appeals that they seize the homes of Muslims' and collaborating with the Mahasabha and RSS to provide refugee relief. In October, for example, the government employment exchange in Delhi was referring refugees to the Mahasabha, which had gathered the names of employers eager to hire refugee labor. Nehru, meanwhile, was demanding police remove the Hindu Mahasabha and Arya Samaj flags that had been affixed atop mosques razed during the mass violence of the previous month.²⁵

The *Hindutva*-ites' prominence in refugee relief was not, however, simply a matter of administrative disarray: the Mahasabha and RSS batted off contradictions and ambivalences in Congress policy. During the second half of August and September, 1947, the government of the Indian Union worked with Pakistani authorities to evacuate

²² Enclosure in S.P. Mookerjee to V. Patel, 26 August 1947, *Sardar's Letters—Mostly Unknown*, V. 2, 241-42.

²³ *Leader*, 9 May 1947; S.P. Mookerjee to Patel, 23 June 1948, *Patel Correspondence*, V. 6, 269-70.

²⁴ Des Raj Goyal, *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh*, 97-98; Gopichand Bhargava to J. Nehru, 14 February 1948, *Patel Correspondence*, 6: 40; J. Nehru to V. Patel, 9 February 1948, 51.

²⁵ HMS, C-167; Nehru to Patel, 22 October 1947, *SWJN*, 2nd Series, 4: 174.

Hindus and Sikhs from west Punjab and Muslims from north-west India. But the communal exchange of populations was contrary to Congress ideology and had not been anticipated, let alone wanted by the Congress leadership.²⁶ Whilst Patel was apparently ready as early as late August to accept the “new facts” on the ground, Gandhi and Nehru hoped that the situation could at least partially be reversed.²⁷

With a view to promoting the refugees’ return to their homes in Pakistan, the government resisted making camp-life too tolerable, giving it the appearance of permanence, or promoting the refugees’ integration into the communities in which they now lived. Under conditions where the Mahasabha and RSS were demanding that India be transformed into a Hindu *Raj* and agitating for the expulsion of Muslims and seizure of their property, Congress leaders rightly feared the implications of recognizing the validity and permanence of a mass communal population exchange. But the Congress leadership’s failure to forthrightly address the refugee problem was also rooted in its reluctance to accept responsibility for what it had wrought. The Congress had justified acceptance of the June 3rd agreement on the grounds that it would resolve the communal problem. Yet Partition, as was now painfully clear, had increased the communal problem’s scope and intensity exponentially.

Government organizational disarray and Congress policy perplexity helped ensure that the refugee crisis festered. Having lost their homes and in many cases their kith and kin, the refugees were psychologically vulnerable to the *Hindutva*-ite claims that they had been doubly orphaned—that they were unwanted by the Congress rulers of their

²⁶ “Annual Report for the Years 1946-48,” *The Encyclopaedia of the Indian National Congress*, V. 13, A.M. Zaidi and S.G. Zaidi, ed., (New Delhi: S. Chand, 1981) 320; Howard Donovan to George Marshall, 18 September 1947, *Jinnah Papers*, First Series, V. 5: 512-13.

²⁷ Pyarelal, *The Last Phase*, V. 2, 393.

homeland. The Mahasabha demanded the refugees be given immediate citizenship rights and carried out a poll among the refugees to demonstrate that the vast majority were determined never to return to Pakistan.

Unquestionably, the political significance of the refugee crisis was increased by the huge refugee presence in India's capital. According to government figures, close to half a million refugees arrived in Delhi in 1947. Within weeks of the massive post-15 August refugee influx, Delhi was convulsed by an eight-day war against the city's Muslim population.²⁸ For months thereafter, the Congress government lived in dread of again losing control over India's capital. "Again and again," reports Pyarelal, the Delhi police had to use tear gas to prevent the seizure of Muslim homes.²⁹

The RSS's and Mahasabha's demand that the refugees be housed in the dwellings of Muslims who had fled was doubly incendiary. It was meant to ensure that the Muslims could never return to their Delhi homes; and, as it promoted the notion that the Muslims were collectively responsible for the losses of the refugees from Pakistan, fostered the view that the burden of providing living space and financial compensation to the refugees should be borne by India's Muslims. As Gandhi observed, that the refugees wanted proper shelter was natural. What was perverse was that the communalist political movements directed them not to demand government assistance, but to covet the property of the Delhi Muslims—fellow victims of the partition trauma.

²⁸ J. Nehru to Bhagavan Das, 10 November 1948, *J. Nehru Works*, 2nd Series, 8: 121-22. Long after order had been restored the *Hindutva*-ites continued to spread the canard that the September convulsion had been provoked by a Muslim attempt to seize Delhi

²⁹ Pyarelal, *The Last Phase*, V. 2, 692.

The *Hindutva*-ites, the Refugees and the Struggle inside Congress

The Congress was riven by conflict in the months following independence. The Socialists were being squeezed out of India's new ruling party and struggles over the spoils of office were myriad. In November the Congress President Archya Kripalani resigned. Among his complaints was that Congress was coddling the Muslims, while ignoring the needs of the Pakistani refugees. The government's failure to raise a national militia, warned Kripalani, was letting the political initiative slip to the RSS and Hindu Mahasabha.³⁰

The rift that most immediately threatened the government was that between Jawaharlal Nehru and Vallabhbhai Patel. Whilst personal ambition undoubtedly played a part, the Prime Minister and Home Minister were at odds over key policy questions, including the government's attitude toward India's Muslim minority, big business, leftist opposition, and the Hindu Nationalists. A further complication was Gandhi, who, although without formal position in the party or government, continued to be revered as the father of the nation. The Mahatma was even more insistent than Nehru on the need for Congress to vigorously assert the place of the Muslim minority within Indian society and polity; on economic questions, by contrast, Gandhi's immediate policy prescriptions—he urged all controls be lifted—accorded more with those of Patel and Patel's big business supporters.

In November Gandhi intervened to change the government's policy on both fronts. At meetings of the CWC and the All-India Congress Committee (AICC), he clashed with Patel over whether the Government of India should campaign for the Muslims of Delhi and the Meos to return to their homes, while working to create

³⁰ Kripalani, *Modern Review*, Dec. 1947: 423-24.

conditions that would enable the refugees from Pakistan to be safely repatriated. The cleavage over this issue was "deep," reports Gandhi's secretary. While Gandhi feared for the INC's commitment to secularism, Patel insisted national security would be gravely compromised if Muslims of "bad record" and doubtful loyalty were allowed to return to India's capital and its environs.³¹

In an AICC address that warned the communalist tide threatened to dash both Indian independence and Hinduism, Gandhi included a perceptive summation of the *Hindutva*-ite attitude toward the conflict among the foremost Congress leaders:

I know what some people are saying. "The Congress has surrendered its soul to the Muslims. Gandhi? Let him rave as he will. He is a wash out. Jawaharlal [Nehru] is no better. As regards Sardar Patel there is something in him. A portion of him is sound Hindu, but he too after all is a Congressman." Such talk will not help us. . . . Who is there in the Hindu Mahasabha who can replace Congress leadership? Violent rowdyism will not save either Hinduism or Sikhism.³²

The Mahasabhites did draw political sustenance from some of Patel's actions. They proclaimed it a triumph for *Hindutva*, when the Home Minister visited Somanath temple, which had been razed by Muslim invaders nine centuries before, and announced it would be rebuilt by the Government of India as a place of active Hindu worship. A potentially significant archaeological site, Somanath had been promoted as a symbol of Hindu resistance to foreign domination in a popular novel written by the right-wing Congressman, Hindu revivalist and sometime Hindu Mahasabha ally, K.M. Munshi.³³

To fully appreciate the communal-political thrust of the Somanath announcement it is necessary to place it in context. In addition to serving as Home Minister, Patel headed the newly created States Ministry, which was responsible for the Indian Union's

³¹ Pyarelal, *The Last Phase*, V. 2, 516.

³² M.K. Gandhi, "Speech at A.I.C.C. Meeting," *CWG*, V. 90, 43.

³³ K.M. Munshi, *Jaya Somanath*, trans. H.M. Patel (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan) 1976.

relations with the princely states. He visited the Somanath ruin in mid-November while on a victory tour of Junagadh, a Kathiawar state whose Muslim ruler had rebelled against integration with India.³⁴ Although Junagadh had an overwhelming Hindu majority and was cut-off by sea and Indian territory from Pakistan, the Nawab had proclaimed in mid-August that he was merging his state with Pakistan. With backing from the Pakistan government, Junagadh mustered bands of Muslim communalists to quell popular unrest. But an Indian government economic blockade and grassroots opposition within Kathiawar soon threw the durbar on the defensive. Any inhibitions India had about using force to vanquish the Junagadh challenge were dispelled after Pakistan sponsored a tribal invasion of Kashmir. Four days after Indian troops had occupied Junagadh, Patel made his triumphant visit.³⁵ Given that the Nawab and his *Dewan*, Sir Shah Nawaz Bhutto, had invoked Muslim communalist ideology to justify their actions and used Muslim communalist forces to intimidate the local population, it was hardly surprising that the fall of Junagadh was accompanied by acts of Hindu communal violence and retribution.³⁶ But rather than seeking to reassure Junagadh's Muslims and popularize the view that the events in Junagadh were part of a broader struggle to rid India of the vestiges of feudalism, Patel by his actions at Somanath cast the Junagadh conflict in communalist terms. Patel could have announced a "thousand and one things" pertaining to "the reconstruction of Junagadh," but instead made the resurrection of a dilapidated Hindu temple eulogized in Hindu revivalist and Hindu nationalist lore the centerpiece of the Indian victory celebration. "Only a cynic, devoid of any respect for national tradition and

³⁴ Menon, *Integration of the Indian States*, 147.

³⁵ There are extensive accounts of the Junagadh episode in Menon, *Integration of the Indian States*, 124-150 and Hodson *The Great Divide*, 427-440. See also, *Modern Review*, November 1947, 349.

³⁶ Pyarelal, *The Last Phase*, V. 2, 488-90.

self-respect can afford to pass off this event light-heartedly,” exalted the *Mahratta*.

Patel’s “was a message of hope and cheer, because it meant that Hindusthan was going to right the wrongs done to the nation, since the 11th century.”³⁷

Patel’s Somanath announcement was only symbolically significant. Not so his and his Ministry’s intervention in the conflict between the Alwar *darbar* and the Meos. In mid-August, in part because of protests from the Pakistan government, the Home Ministry launched an inquiry into the Alwar government’s terror campaign against the Meos.³⁸ But by the fall, Home Ministry officials were working with the Alwar *darbar* to block the Meos’ return and to settle Hindu and Sikh refugees from east Punjab on their lands. Patel and his deputy, V.P. Menon, now parroted the *darbar*’s claims that the Meos were a criminal tribe and that they had been acting in concert with the Muslim League to grab territory from India.³⁹

Emboldened by this support, the Alwar *darbar* instigated a new round of violent attacks against the state’s Muslims in mid-November. The *Dewan* of Alwar and future All-India President of the Hindu Mahasabha, N.B. Khare is reputed to have promised to give the first person to raze a mosque the land on which it was situated.⁴⁰ In the longer-term, the actions of Patel and his Ministry served to subvert the efforts of Gandhi and his disciple, Vinoba Bhave, to repatriate the Meos, thus ensuring that the *Hindutva*-ite spearheaded ethnic-cleansing of Alwar and the greater Mewat region was never reversed.

³⁷ *Mahratta*, 28 November 1947. For more on the decision to resurrect the Somanath temple and the subsequent debates over its reconstruction see K.M. Munshi, *Pilgrimage to Freedom*, V. 1, 287-288 and 559-565. Under pressure from Gandhi, Patel ultimately agreed that the money needed to rebuild the temple would be raised through public subscription, not supplied by the state. (*Ibid.*, 287.)

³⁸ N.B. Khare, *My Political Memoirs*, 308.

³⁹ N.B. Khare, *My Political Memoirs*, 317-19; V.P. Menon, *Integration of the Indian States*, 252-53; Patel to K.C. Neogy, 27 February 1948, and Patel to Rajendra Prasad, 24 June 1948, *Patel Correspondence*, 6: 252-53 and 383-85.

⁴⁰ J. Nehru to V. Patel, 3 December 1947 and n. 2, *SWJN*, 2nd Series, 4: 532-33.

Only after Gandhi's assassination did those in the Congress leadership who held that their party and the government were at risk of succumbing to Hindu communalist pressure succeed in wresting the initiative.

At Gandhi's insistence, the mid-November AICC meeting adopted resolutions that restated the Congress' opposition to the "two nations" theory and, by implication, the call for India to be transformed into a Hindu *Raj*; pledged India would work for the return of the refugees—Hindu, Sikh and Muslim—to their homes; condemned the Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha as communalist organizations; and warned that the actions of the RSS and other private armies were "a menace to the hard won freedom of the country."⁴¹ But Gandhi recognized that many who voted for these resolutions had no intention of implementing them.⁴² He declared that the test of whether he had prevailed on the communal issue would be whether the hundreds of thousands of Muslims then on the road to Pakistan could be persuaded to return to their homes in India. In particular he was concerned with the fate of a large number of Muslims who were encamped at Panipat while awaiting military escort to Pakistan. Gandhi dubbed the struggle to convince the Muslims at Panipat that they could have a safe and equitable future in India the Fourth Battle of Panipat. Gandhi lost the battle; indeed, it was a total rout. Refugees from Pakistan attacked Panipat's Muslims and in early December the Muslim refugees insisted on being evacuated to Pakistan.⁴³

⁴¹ Pyarelal, *The Last Phase*, V. 2, 518-520. For the text of the resolutions see, Zaidi and Zaidi, ed., *The Encyclopaedia of the Indian National Congress*, V. 13, 114-119.

⁴² Pyarelal, *The Last Phase*, V. 2, 519.

⁴³ Pyarelal, *The Last Phase*, V. 2, 512 and 521; D.G. Tendulkar, *Mahatma—Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, Revised Edition, V. 8, (Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, GOI, 1963) 180-81, 193-94, and 211-12.

Nehru, for his part, made repeated warnings about the dangers represented by the RSS and the Mahasabha and cautioned against allowing them to flout government orders and promote communal hatred.⁴⁴ To Patel, who was directly responsible for public security and the conduct of the police, Nehru frequently forwarded Muslim protests that the authorities had failed to protect them. Even a historian sympathetic to Patel, concedes that the Home Minister “was visibly impatient when Nehru brought cases of communal bias of Hindu officials to his notice.”⁴⁵ In most cases, little if anything was done. The *Hindu Outlook* was suppressed in mid-November, but for anti-Congress vitriol, not for inciting anti-Muslim violence.⁴⁶ An inquiry into the assassination of Gandhi subsequently found that police in Bombay Presidency, from whence the plot to kill the Mahatma originated, largely ignored Mahasabha violence and incendiary rhetoric because it was directed against Muslims, and in their view harm to Muslims did not constitute a threat to the Congress government and Indian state.⁴⁷

A recent study has claimed that what prevented the Congress-led government from acting more vigorously against the Hindu communalists during the fall and early winter of 1947-48 was the INC’s tradition of upholding civil liberties.⁴⁸ While this cannot be entirely discounted as a factor, it was a small one. The principal reason was that the Hindu communalists enjoyed widespread sympathy and support within the state apparatus and all levels of the Congress.

⁴⁴ Eg. two letters of Nehru to Patel, 30 September 1947, *SWJN*, 2nd Series, V. 4, 109 and 113-14; Nehru to Patel, 27 October, 1947, *Ibid.*, 517; Nehru to Dalip Singh, 21 November 1947, *Ibid.*, 330; Nehru to Premiers, 7 December 1947, *Ibid.*, 461-62; Nehru to Pant, 17 December and 29 December, 1947, *Ibid.*, 222 and 476.

⁴⁵ Mahajan, *Independence and Partition*, 325.

⁴⁶ *Mahratta*, 21 November 1947; Nehru to Patel, 27 October, 1947, *SWJN*, 2nd Series, 4: 517.

⁴⁷ *Gandhi Murder Inquiry*, Part 2, 344-47.

⁴⁸ Mahajan, *Independence and Partition*, 316.

In early January 1948, Patel warned a meeting in the UP capital of Lucknow against attempts to suppress the *Hindutva*-ites with ordinances and arrests. *Danda* (the rod) was meant for dealing with thieves and dacoits not misguided “patriots.” The RSS men, affirmed the Home Minister, “are to be won over by Congressmen with love.” In keeping with his own advice, Patel urged the RSS cadres not to be rash, tactless, or aggressive; the government would make any disloyal Muslims quit Hindusthan. Addressing the Mahasabhites, Patel urged them not to think they were “the only custodians” of “Hindu culture and religion.” Nothing would be “served by remaining aloof.” They should join the Congress and strengthen the government.⁴⁹

The immediate impulse for Patel’s remarks was the UP government’s consideration of a ban on RSS activities. According to a report in the *Leader* of January 1, 1948, the UP Secretariat had begun work on a chargesheet against the RSS that included sensational disclosures of its role in looting, daocities, arson, illegal arms traffic, and murder. Some RSS leaders of “social standing” were already in detention. As intended, the Home Minister’s speech caused the UP government to desist from taking any action against the RSS. A senior police official would later claim Patel had told him that to ban the RSS and risk riling the Hindus would be highly dangerous as India’s Muslims were already ranged against the government.⁵⁰

Once again on the limits of Mahasabha Expansion

Although the Mahasabha battered off the partition tragedy, the increase in support that it experienced in the first five-and-a-half-months of independent India left no

⁴⁹ *Leader*, 8 January 1948; Pyarelal, *The Last Phase*, V. 2, 693; Bruce Graham, *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics*, 10.

⁵⁰ *Leader*, 1 and 14 January, 1948; *Gandhi Murder Inquiry*, Part 1, 184 and Part 2, 62. See also Nehru’s support for the UP government acting against the RSS (Nehru to Pant, 17 December and 29 December, 1947, *SWJN*, 2nd Series, 4: 222 and 476).

lasting imprint. The RSS, like the Mahasabha, endured significant state repression following the assassination of M.K. Gandhi, yet its refugee and militia work did contribute to a long-term increase in the RSS's support and stature. The Mahasabha and RSS cooperated closely in 1947, especially in their "mass" work and shared a common ideology. If the ultimate credit accrued to the RSS it is undoubtedly in large part because it was the bigger and better organized of the two *Hindutva*-ite organizations, with both a cadre experienced in assimilating new recruits and a vibrant youth movement. But two other factors were at play: the ostensibly "non-political" RSS was better-positioned to draw on support from sympathetic Congress and state officials, as well as from businessmen and others not anxious to get on the wrong side of the new government. The Mahasabha was publicly identified as a party of the elite—of princes and *zamindars* and other title-holders in the now defunct British *Raj*.

Mass contact did prod the Mahasabhites into attempting another populist makeover. In late 1947, the Working Committee voted to establish a committee, staffed by many of the organization's principal national leaders, to reorient the policy of the Mahasabha "so as to make it more effective as an organ of progressive opinion in the field of social, economic and political uplift of the Indian masses ..." ⁵¹ But even as some in their ranks revived talk of "Hindu socialism," the Mahasabhites pursued their efforts to rally princely and landlord opposition to the new regime. Mahasabha General Secretary Lahiry made the rounds of the princes trying to secure their support for the Hindu National Front. ⁵² He even paid a visit to Nepal—the independent Himalayan kingdom venerated by Hindu Mahasabhites and many of the Hindu princes as the only genuine

⁵¹ Prakash, *History of the Hindu Mahasabha*, 1952 edition, 250.

⁵² Ashutosh Lahiry to the Maharaj of Jodhpur, 27 November and 19 December 1947, Lahiry Papers.

Hindu *Rashtra*. On his return, Lahiry issued a statement supporting the Nepalese monarchy against the “unscrupulous” propaganda mounted by persons outside the state for responsible government.⁵³ Moonje, meanwhile, criticized India’s Congress regime for pressing forward with *zamindari* abolition and democratic reform of the states when it should have been concentrating on making India a military power.⁵⁴

In Alwar, *Dewan* Khare included a Mahasabhite in a reorganized state executive or cabinet. When the Congress-allied Praja Mandal objected to sitting in government alongside a Mahasabha representative, Khare tartly replied that if a Mahasabhite could serve in the Indian Union cabinet why not in Alwar’s. He then brought the Mahasabha into government, leaving the Mandal to rant from the outside.⁵⁵

Alwar, however, was the exception. Although there is evidence that some princes gave financial and other covert support to the Mahasabha, they remained as skittish as ever about ceding any of their power or risking conflict with Delhi by associating too overtly with the Mahasabha. The Central Indian state of Dhar cancelled elections for fear that the Mahasabha would top the polls.⁵⁶

In Gwalior the Mahasabhites had mounted a major agitation in August-September 1947 with the ostensible purpose of pressing the state to reduce the number of Muslims in state employment. While the Gwalior Rajya Hindu Sabha no doubt did want a purge of Muslims in government service, the real grievance that animated the Mahasabha’s direct action campaign was its exclusion from the state’s Constituent Assembly delegation and from the Constitutional Reforms Committee the Maharaja had

⁵³ *Mahratta*, 31 October 1947.

⁵⁴ *Leader*, 11 January 1948.

⁵⁵ Khare, *My Political Memoirs*, 348-51.

⁵⁶ Jaffrelot, *Dissertation*, 483-84.

constituted on India's Independence Day. In October, after more than nine hundred Mahasabhites had been taken into custody, a deal was struck, under which the state government agreed to give a sympathetic hearing to the Mahasabhites' demands and to appoint two leaders of the Gwalior Rajya Hindu Sabha to the Reforms Committee. The Mahasabhites for their part apologized for "disrespectful references" to the Maharaja made by "some irresponsible persons" under the Mahasabha flag and pledged "profound loyalty and respect to throne of the Scindias [the ruling family]." ⁵⁷ Subsequently, Khare visited the state and the *darbar* resumed its policy of promoting the Mahasabha as a counterweight to the Congress. With the Congress-aligned Gwalior Praja Mandal threatening to resort to direct action to press its demand for responsible government, the Maharaja gave a large donation—Patel put it at 25,000 rupees, a Gwalior Congress worker at 65,000—to local Mahasabha leaders to organize against the Mandal. ⁵⁸ But in mid-January 1948, the Maharaja switched gears yet again, suddenly issuing an invitation to the Praja Mandal to form the state government. The shocked Mahasabhites decried the Praja Mandal's installation in office prior to elections as anti-democratic and accused the Gwalior *darbar* of violating the commitments it had given the Rajya Hindu Sabha regarding the reform of the state's constitution. ⁵⁹ Soon after Patel commended Gwalior's ruler for having extricated himself from involvement with the Mahasabha when he did, for otherwise "you would have found yourself in deep waters." ⁶⁰

⁵⁷ *Leader*, 29 August and 13 and 22 October 1947. See also the correspondence between Moonje and the Dewan and Maharaja of Gwalior in B.S. Moonje Papers, File 66 and M.A. Sreenivasan, *Of the Raj, Maharajas and Me* (New Delhi: 1991) 219-221.

⁵⁸ *Gandhi Murder Inquiry*, Part 1, 249-50; Patel to the Maharaja of Gwalior, 28 February 1948, *Patel Correspondence*, V. 6, 61.

⁵⁹ *Leader*, 26 January 1948; Manohar Malgonkar, *The Men Who Killed Gandhi*, 135-36.

⁶⁰ Patel to the Maharaja of Gwalior, 28 February 1948, *Patel Correspondence*, 6: 61.

The Congress and Hindu Mahasabha in the first months of independent India

Relations between the Congress and Hindu Mahasabha in the five-and-a-half months between independence and Gandhi's assassination belie simple explanation. Even as the political agendas of the Congress and Mahasabha overlapped and support for *Hindutva*-ite-championed ideas and causes swelled among Congressmen, the antagonism between the two organizations was rapidly coming to the boil.

Within both the Congress and Hindu Mahasabha there was an important element who saw the events of 1947 as having demonstrated that the two organizations were intrinsically allied. Others argued that whilst circumstances might have compelled them to collaborate, Partition and the partition trauma had deepened the cleavage between the Congress and Mahasabha.

Home Minister Patel praised the RSS as patriots and urged the Hindu Mahasabha to dissolve into the Congress. Nehru, by contrast, characterized the *Hindutva*-ites as the principal threat to his government and its democratic reform program. The Hindu Mahasabha was functioning "as the main opposition to the Government and to the Congress" and "continually inciting to violence," observed Nehru shortly before Gandhi's assassination. As for the RSS, its association "with riots and disorder" was even more intimate and incontrovertible.⁶¹

While acknowledging that individual Congressmen succumbed to Hindu communalist pressure, Sucheta Mahajan has claimed that "the Indian state, the provincial governments and the party resolutely stood their ground ..."⁶² As proof, Mahajan points to the Congress' refusal to proclaim India a Hindu *Rashtra* or bow to *Hindutva*-ite

⁶¹ J. Nehru to S.P. Mookerjee, 28 January 1948, *SWJN* (2nd Series), 5: 30-31.

⁶² Sucheta Mahajan, *Independence and Partition*, 321.

demands that the state deny Muslims full citizenship rights. Undoubtedly the Congress' opposition to the more extreme of the Mahasabha/RSS demands did impact positively on India's subsequent development. But Mahajan's exoneration of the state, government and Congress is entirely unwarranted. The Home Ministry effort to uphold the ethnic-cleansing of the Meos stands out as an example of state/Congress complicity in the achievement of Mahasabha objectives. But even when Congress governments resisted the most extreme *Hindutva*-ite demands, they frequently made concessions to Hindu communalist sentiment. And at all levels, from the Indian Union cabinet down, Congressmen and Mahasabhites collaborated.

The UP Congress Ministry, as we saw in the previous chapter, moved decisively in August 1947 to nip a Hindu Mahasabha Direct Action campaign in the bud. Yet three months later, the UP government implemented one of the Mahasabhites' principal demands, issuing an administrative order that Hindi in the Deva Nagari script should serve as the state's language of official business. The UP order de-legitimized Urdu, which many of Hindi's promoters derided as a Muslim or Pakistani language, and bolstered efforts at the all-India level to make Hindi—not the Hindi/Urdu composite Hindustani—India's official language.⁶³ Both nationally and in UP, the pro-Hindi campaign was spearheaded by Purushottamdas Tandon, and his Hindi Sahitya Sammelan.⁶⁴ Elected Speaker of the UP Assembly in the summer of 1947, Tandon had long-favored an alliance with the Hindu Mahasabha, frequently echoed its calls for the training of volunteers to organize Hindu "self-defence", and, in response to the June 3rd

⁶³ Das Gupta, *Language Conflict and National Development: Group Politics and National Language Policy in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970) 130-52.

⁶⁴ Jyotindra Das Gupta, 113 and 131-32. Gandhi had participated in the leadership of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, but in 1942 ceased to do so, because of its increasingly overt anti-Urdu bias. With Nehru and Rajendra Prasad, Gandhi then founded the Hindustani Prachar Sabha. See Jyotindra Das Gupta, 118-119.

transfer of power agreement, had founded his own militia, the Hindu Rakshak Dal.⁶⁵ The principal resolution at the Hindi Sahikya Sammelan's December 1947 annual conference, was introduced by Tandon and seconded by none other than V.D. Savarkar.⁶⁶

In Maharashtra, the Savarkite stronghold, there was both substantive and symbolic cooperation between the Mahasabha and sections of the Congress and Hyderabad State Congress, many of whose leaders had taken up residence in Poona. Mahasabhites and Congressmen collaborated in organizing resistance, including armed resistance, to the Nizam's autocratic regime in Hyderabad. Undoubtedly, the Mahasabhites' opposition to the Nizam, who increasingly sought to base his rule on Muslim communalism, was genuine, but, they also used the Hyderabad movement as a cover for preparing anti-Muslim violence in Bombay Presidency.⁶⁷ Top leaders of the Congress in Maharashtra, including Bombay's Premier B.G. Kher, Union Minister N.V. Gadgil, and Maharashtra Provincial Congress Committee President Keshavrao Jedhe, joined Savarkar and other leading Mahasabhites on the N.C. Kelkar Memorial Committee. The same issue of the *Mahratta* that announced the Committee's formation carried a statement from its Working President, Mahasabha President Bhopatkar, that warned "the pro-Muslim" attitude of the Congress and Congress-led government was abetting the Muslim League and Pakistan in preparing a "holocaust" of India's Hindus and Sikhs.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Account of Meeting of Parliamentary Board of Agra and Oudh Provincial Hindu Sabhas held at Cawnpore 23-24 September 1945, undated and unsigned, SPM Papers (Instalment II-IV) File 96; William Gould, "Congress Radicals and Hindu Militancy: Sampurnanand and Purushottam Das Tandon in the Politics of the United Provinces, 1930-1947," *MAS*, 36 (2002) 651; Mahajan, *Independence and Partition*, 312.

⁶⁶ *Leader*, 1 January 1948.

⁶⁷ *Gandhi Murder Inquiry*, Part 1, 302, 309-310, and 354 and Part 2, 342 and 346.

⁶⁸ *Mahratta*, 19 December 1947.

Further light on the Mahasabha-Congress relationship is shed by a pamphlet published by the All-India Congress Committee. Although critical of Savarkar, *Indian Political Parties* opined that the Mahasabha's promotion of Hindu communal consciousness had "perhaps served as a good foil to the League." Mookerjee, meanwhile, was credited with "'nationalizing' Mahasabha politics." "[E]ver since" his term as President, the Mahasabha had "been less aggressive than the League and less irresponsible."⁶⁹

Patel's January 6, 1948 call for the Mahasabhites to merge with the Congress was no momentary lapse of judgment. Before and after the 1945 Central Assembly elections, Patel had urged the Mahasabha to dissolve itself into the Congress. He negotiated Mookerjee's entry into the first post-independence government, then established a close working relationship with him.

Patel sought to transform the ad hoc, intermittent, and—Mookerjee's participation in the Union government notwithstanding—unacknowledged alliance between the Hindu communal right and Congress into a permanent political re-alignment.

To recognize this is not to say that Patel's politics need not be distinguished from those of the Mahasabha and RSS. Patel wanted to harness the Hindu communal right to the Congress so as to strengthen his hand against Nehru and reorient the government to meet the threat to "order" he perceived from the left and popular pressure for radical socio-economic change. Patel's motivations are underscored by a speech he gave the day before issuing his infamous call for the RSS to be won over with love. Speaking to Calcutta's business elite, India's Home Minister harshly criticized the March 1947 budget, urged capital to "disabuse" itself of any belief "the Cabinet is in anyway hostile

⁶⁹ N.V. Rakjumar, *Indian Political Parties* (New Delhi: All-India Congress Committee, 1948) 113-120.

to your interests,” called for arbitration in lieu of “ruinous” labor strife, and warned against Communist subversion.⁷⁰

For Patel it was a given that he and the Congress right would be in the saddle in any formal alliance or merger with *Hindutva*-ites. The Mahasabha was to be subsumed in the Congress. The RSS was to be allied with the Congress-led government as a “non-political” cultural organization.

That there was a significant constituency in the Congress for such a link-up with the Hindu right can be readily demonstrated. At the Gandhi murder trial, Savarkar presented evidence that in response to Patel’s call for the Mahasabha to rally to the Congress, the Congress Premier of the Central Provinces, R.S. Shukla, and D.P. Mishra, the CP Home Minister, had urged Mahasabha leaders to meet with them and seek an audience with Patel.⁷¹ In 1949, no sooner had the ban imposed on the RSS after Gandhi’s assassination been lifted, than Patel led the Congress Working Committee in voting to allow RSS members to join the Congress.

Two key factors are generally overlooked in accounts of Nehru’s ultimately successful battle to prevent the Mahasabha and RSS from finding a home in the post-independence Congress. In seeking to restrict the Hindu communalists to the margins of Indian politics, Nehru and his supporters were able to simultaneously draw support from and invoke the threat of a vibrant left-wing outside the Congress. Second, the visceral anti-Congress views of the majority of Hindu Mahasabha members constituted a formidable obstacle to Patel’s plans for a political re-alignment.

⁷⁰ *Leader*, 8 January 1948.

⁷¹ “Translation of Exhibit D/83 A Letter (In Hindi) dated 12 January 1948, from Ram Krishan Pandya to Datya Satut, of the Mahakoshal Provincial Hindu Sabha,” reproduced in K.L. Gauba, *The Assassination of Mahatma Gandhi* (Bombay: Jaico, 1969) 102.

Partition and its accompanying horrors had confirmed the more extreme Hindu Mahasabhis in their belief that the Congress was a Muslim/Pakistani fifth column. And much of the Mahasabha cadre and periphery saw in Congress land reform and its campaign to democratize the princely states the spectre of communism. As mass anti-Muslim violence subsided at the end of 1947, the Mahasabhis more and more directed their fire at the Congress and the Congress-led government. The Mahasabha's growing radicalism and audacity is probably best exemplified by its attitude to Gandhi's January 1948 fast.

II: The Hindu Mahasabha and the Assassination of M.K. Gandhi

At the beginning of 1948, the seventy-seven year-old Gandhi once again sought to galvanize the public, Congress and government, to resist Hindu communalist pressure. On January 13, he began a fast with the twin goals of stanching the threat of renewed communal violence and compelling the Indian government to pay Pakistan money owing from the partition settlement. The Congress-dominated cabinet had balked at making the 55 million rupee payment, claiming Pakistan had violated the partition agreement by invading Kashmir.

With the possible exception of his 1932 fast against separate Untouchable electorates, none of Gandhi's many fasts was so controversial. Certainly, none was so unpopular in Congress circles. After all, Gandhi was in part fasting against the Congress-led government. Patel, for decades an intimate of Gandhi, made no secret of his opposition. The Home Minister absented himself from Delhi for the duration of Gandhi's fast and, on his return, pressed for a meeting to consider whether his differences with

Gandhi and Nehru did not warrant his withdrawing from the government and Congress leadership.⁷²

Even more relevant for this discussion was the Mahasabhites' reaction. Gandhi's fast enraged them no end. To their minds, the Mahatma was once again coming to the succour of Hindus' most implacable foes—the Muslims and their ill-gotten Pakistan.

Increasingly, the Mahasabhites made Gandhi and other Congress leaders the butt of violent verbal attacks, challenged the government's legitimacy, and flouted the law. Mahasabha leader V.G. Deshpande told a Bihar audience that Nehru, Patel and A.K. Azad should be hanged.⁷³ A speaker at a January 18 Mahasabha meeting in Delhi, organized to protest against Gandhi's fast, labelled the Mahatma a dictator and said he might soon suffer Hitler's fate.⁷⁴ The Mahasabhites incited refugees to demonstrate outside Birla House, where Gandhi resided during his fast. Among their chants was *marta hai to marne do*—"If he wants to die, let him die."⁷⁵

For some Mahasabhite cadre, the talk of executing Congress leaders for their reputed anti-Hindu crimes was more than fiery rhetoric. Gandhi's fast resolved the Hindu Rashtra Dal leaders Nathuram Godse and Narayan Apte to act on their long-germinating conviction that Gandhi should be removed from the Indian political equation through assassination. They had no difficulty in finding Mahasabha accomplices.

Gandhi broke his fast in its sixth day, on January 18, after a Peace Committee led by A.K. Azad reported that representatives of Delhi's major political and religious

⁷² "Chapter 1, Patel-Nehru Rift Widens," *Patel Correspondence*, 6: 1-26; "Note to Mahatama Gandhi," 6 January, 1948, *SWJN*, Second Series, 6: 471-75; Pyarelal, *The Last Phase*, V. 2, 693-94, 705 and 720-22.

⁷³ Patel to S.P. Mookerjee, 8 February 1948, *Patel Correspondence*, 6: 37; J. Nehru to Krishna Sinha, 27 January 1948 and J. Nehru to S.P. Mookerjee, *SWJN*, 2nd Series, 5: 29 and 30.

⁷⁴ *Gandhi Murder Inquiry*, Part 1, 11 and 154-55.

⁷⁵ *Gandhi Murder Inquiry*, Part 1, 10 and Part 2, 355.

organizations had signed a communal peace-pledge. The four-point pledge committed the endorsees to supporting the return of all Muslims who had fled to Pakistan and upholding Muslims' right to live and travel wherever they wanted without hindrance or harassment.

⁷⁶ Earlier the Indian Union cabinet had bowed to Gandhi's request and paid the balance due to Pakistan.

The Peace Committee claimed Mahasabha representatives had joined in the peace pledge. But the day after Gandhi broke his fast, Mahasabha General Secretary Ashutosh Lahiry issued a press statement condemning the pledge and saying those who had endorsed it lacked Mahasabha authorization.⁷⁷

In subsequent days, the Mahasabhites took to the streets in defiance of a government ban on rallies and demonstrations to condemn the peace pledge as Muslim appeasement and vent their fury against the Congress government. On January 27, five thousand Mahasabhite supporters staged an illegal demonstration in Connaught Place, the very centre of New Delhi. While police stood by, Mahasabha luminaries V.G. Deshpande, Professor Ram Singh and *Mahant* Digvijaynath gave brief speeches whose common theme was that the Congress government had lost public confidence and forfeited the right to govern. Resolutions repudiating the peace pledge and the government's commitment to hold a referendum to decide the fate of Kashmir were adopted. According to intelligence reports, the crowd resounded with chants of "Turn out Muslims" and "Madanlal Zindabad" (Long live Madanlal). The latter slogan implied support for violence against Gandhi, if not his murder, since it celebrated the 19 year-old

⁷⁶ For the text of the Pledge see Pyarelal, *The Last Phase*, V. 2, 728-29.

⁷⁷ *Gandhi Murder Inquiry*, Part 1, 11; Ashutosh Lahiry, *Gandhi in Indian Politics: A Critical Review* (Calcutta: Firma KLM Private Ltd., 1976) 132.

Punjabi refugee Madanlal Pahwa who had been arrested on January 20 for throwing a bomb at Gandhi's daily prayer meeting.⁷⁸

(Following Gandhi's assassination it emerged that Madanlal's bomb had been meant to create a diversion, so others, under the direction of Nathuram Godse and Narayan Apte, could shoot Gandhi. The designated assassins lost their nerve, however, and a second attempt on Gandhi's life had to be mounted ten days later.)

In the days immediately prior to Gandhi's assassination, top Congress leaders—including, Nehru, Rajendra Prasad and Gandhi himself—expressed alarm over the Mahasabhaites' menacing stance.⁷⁹ Nehru wrote to the Director of India's Intelligence bureau to draw his attention to "the increasingly aggressive and offensive activities of the Hindu Mahasabha."⁸⁰ The next day, January 28, he wrote his Minister of Industry, S.P. Mookerjee to complain about the Mahasabha:

For some time past I have been greatly distressed by the activities of the Hindu Mahasabha. At the present moment it is functioning not only as the main opposition to the Government and to the Congress in India but as an organisation continually inciting to violence. ... Gandhi Murdabad is one of their special slogans.

Nehru concluded his letter by saying Congressmen were "continually" asking him about Mookerjee's attitude to the Mahasabha and its virulent anti-government agitation. "I should be grateful to you if you will let me know how you propose to deal with this situation which must be embarrassing to you as it is to me."⁸¹

⁷⁸ *Gandhi Murder Inquiry*, Part 1, 146-47 and 155 and Part 2, 57.

⁷⁹ Evidence of Nehru's and Gandhi's alarm is presented below. Prasad expressed his concerns in a 29 January 1948 letter to S.P. Mookerjee. See *Dr. Rajendra Prasad: Correspondence and Select Documents*, 8: 48.

⁸⁰ J. Nehru to T.G. Sanjeevi, 27 Jan 48, *SWJN*, 2nd Series, 5: 29. See also Nehru to Bihar Premier Krishna Sinha, 27 Jan 48, 29-30.

⁸¹ J. Nehru to S.P. Mookerjee, 28 Jan. 48, *SWJN*, 2nd Series, 5: 30-31.

Pyarelal reports that Gandhi had him seek out Mookerjee so as to urge that the Mahasabha leader curb the rhetoric of a party worker who "had been delivering highly inflammatory speeches containing incitement to assassination of some Congress leaders." When informed of Mookerjee's "halting and unsatisfactory" reply, the Mahatma's brow darkened.⁸²

The next day, 30 January 1948, Gandhi was killed—his murderer a veteran Mahasabhaite and the co-publisher of a newspaper that routinely published visceral attacks on Gandhi and the Congress.

The debate over Gandhi's assassination continues to this day. Why did the investigation into the first assassination attempt meander? What was the extent of the conspiracy? Did Gandhi have a death wish?⁸³

Our concern in the pages that follow will be three-fold. First, we will consider the assassination's impact on the Mahasabha and the Indian political equation. Second, we will argue that the Mahasabha must bear political responsibility for Gandhi's murder. Third, we shall show that many in the Mahasabha were sympathetic to the assassins, if not supportive of their deed.

Before proceeding, one point needs to be emphasized. The principals in the Gandhi murder conspiracy were not peripheral or incidental to the Hindu Mahasabha. Nathuram Godse had for several years been a member of the Mahasabha's All-India Committee. He and his associate, Narayan Apte, were trusted lieutenants of Savarkar and like other Hindu Rashtra Dal leaders had pledged him their personal loyalty. In 1941

⁸² Pyarelal, *The Last Phase*, V. 2, 768.

⁸³ There is an extensive literature on the assassination of Gandhi. Among the more insightful contributions is Ashis Nandy's "Final Encounter: The Politics of the Assassination of Gandhi," *At the Edge of Psychology* (Oxford: OUP, 1980) 70-98.

Savarkar had sent Godse to Bhaglapur to organize the Mahasabha's defiance of the ban on its annual session. Claiming that they needed to be close at hand to minister to the ailing Savarkar, Godse and Apte asked the Mahasabha headquarters to billet them near him during the October 1944 *Akhand Hindusthan* Conference. For his part, the chief ideologue of *Hindutva* helped his Poona-based disciples secure financing for their various newspapers and frequently received them as visitors at his Bombay compound.⁸⁴

Given Savarkar's close connection to the killers, his terrorist past, and ongoing incitement of anti-Muslim violence, it would have been highly irresponsible of the police and government had they not investigated whether the former Mahasabha President was at the root of the conspiracy to assassinate Gandhi.

The impact of the assassination: Gandhi's assassination shook the country and panicked the government. Not least among its many consequences was that Nehru and Patel decided to set aside their personal and political differences. Many Congress leaders who had colluded with the Hindutv-ites now recoiled in horror. Part of this was genuine, but it is also undeniable that many Congress politicians were motivated by the basest self-interest. The UP CID reported that Congress leaders denounced RSS cadres associated with their rivals, while seeking to protect those they had befriended.⁸⁵ In Maharashtra, a section of the Congress leadership that had roots in the non-Brahmin movement channelled popular anger against Gandhi's assassins and the Mahasabha leadership into

⁸⁴ *Gandhi Murder Inquiry*, Part 1, 77-79 and Part 2, 66-68; N. Godse to V.G. Deshpande, 20 Sept. 1944, HMS C-60, Part IV; Walter Andersen, "The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh," *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 25, 1972, 673; Nathuram Godse, *May it Please Your Honour* (Delhi: Surya-Prakashan, 1989) 142-43.

⁸⁵ *UP Intelligence Abstracts*, 20 February 1948, 29.

a general assault on the Chitpavan Brahmin community. Order was restored only when the army was deployed and hundreds of rioters arrested.⁸⁶

Thousands of RSS and Mahasabha members were held by police in the days and weeks following Gandhi's assassination. So many Mahasabha Working Committee members were either arrested or in detention that it had difficulty mustering a quorum for an emergency meeting. This repression had a chilling effect. Some publicly renounced their Mahasabha membership; others were cowed into silence.⁸⁷

The Mahasabha fell into a stupor, reports its then General Secretary.⁸⁸ Whilst the arrests and state surveillance of the Mahasabha contributed, it was far from the only factor. The Mahasabhites were shaken by the breadth, suddenness and intensity of the change in the popular mood. Revulsion at Gandhi's murder and animosity toward those who had railed against him was widespread, including among the refugees. According to the RSS and Jana Sangh leader Balraj Madhok, there was a "strong public reaction against the advocates of a bold policy towards Pakistan."⁸⁹

Accounts of this period often exaggerate the extent to which the government and Congress turned against the Mahasabhites and RSS. Gandhi's assassination did not put an end to the efforts of Patel and Congress right to make use of the *Hindutva*-ites in a political re-alignment. But there was an abrupt change in the political climate. Partition, communal population transfers, and mass violence had pushed the debate over socio-economic change to the margins. In the weeks and months following Gandhi's

⁸⁶ B.G. Kher to Patel, 26 May 1948, *Patel Correspondence*, 6: 77-80.

⁸⁷ *UP Intelligence Abstracts*, 6, February, 21-22; Various reports in *Leader*, 3 through 10 February, 1948; S.P. Mookerjee to Patel, 14 February 1948, *Patel Correspondence*, 6: 41; Indrajit Sood to N.B. Khare, 3 May 1951, HMS P-132.

⁸⁸ Ashutosh Lahiry to V.D. Savarkar, April 1952, Lahiry Papers, Savarkar Correspondence.

⁸⁹ Balraj Madhok, *Portrait of a Martyr*, 82.

assassination, India's urgent social problems reclaimed center-stage. Gandhi's assassination and the strong anti-*Hindutva*-ite reaction it provoked in government circles and the broader populace can, in retrospect, be seen as marking the end of the immediate post-independence period of mass communal violence, government disarray and surging support for the Hindu right.

Five days after Gandhi's assassination, the Government of India declared the RSS to be an unlawful organization. If the Hindu Mahasabha was not subjected to a like ban, it was only because Patel joined Mookerjee in arguing against such action in cabinet. Had the Mahasabha been banned, Mookerjee's position within the government would have been untenable.⁹⁰ The decision to forego a ban did not mean, however, that Mookerjee's ministerial post was secure. Under pressure from Nehru to speak out against the Mahasabha and sever his ties with it, Mookerjee issued a statement on 6 February 1948 calling on the Mahasabha to either cease political work and focus exclusively on Hindu social, cultural and religious matters or "abandon its communal composition" and "throw its doors open to any citizen, irrespective of religion, who may be willing to accept its economic and political programme."⁹¹

At Mookerjee's urging, those Mahasabha Working Committee members not in police custody, voted at an emergency meeting February 14-15, to suspend the organization's "political activities and to concentrate on real sangathan work" so as to create a "powerful and well-organized Hindu society in independent India."⁹²

⁹⁰ B. Graham, *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics*, 12.

⁹¹ J. Nehru to Mookerjee, 4 Feb 1948, *SWJN*, 2nd Series, 5: 46-47. Mookerjee as cited in Graham, *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics*, 13.

⁹² "Resolutions of the Hindu Mahasabha, 14-15 February 1948," *Select Documents: India 1947-50*, V. 1, ed. S.L. Poplai (London, OUP, 1959) 552.

Ultimately the Mahasabhites would re-affirm their mission as an expressly Hindu communal political party. But this is a thread in our narrative to be taken up later.

Mookerjee's maneuvering kept him a place at the cabinet table. In the ensuing months he acted as a veritable attorney for the Mahasabha within government, urging the swift release of the Mahasabha and RSS detainees and arguing that Gandhi's assassination was the work of a handful of renegade members and in no way the outcome of Mahasabha politics.⁹³ Notes pertaining to Savarkar's defence, including the strategy to be adopted in questioning different witnesses at his trial, are to be found in Mookerjee's papers.⁹⁴ Mookerjee's failure to appreciate the danger to Gandhi—as evidenced by his reaction to the request relayed by Pyarelal—does not seem to have caused him to pause to consider the nature of the forces germinating under the *Hindutva*-ite banner. His next political project would be to launch a new political party with the RSS, which had “behaved in an even worse way” toward India's Muslims than the Mahasabha.⁹⁵

The Political Responsibility of the Mahasabha: Five men were ultimately convicted of conspiring to murder M.K. Gandhi—the leaders of the Poona chapter of the Hindu Rashttra Dal, Nathuram Godse and Narayan Apte; Godse's brother, Gopal; Vishnu Karkare, a Hindu Mahasabha leader in Ahmednagar; and the Punjabi refugee Madanlal Pahwa. Digambar Badge, a Poona arms peddler, Mahasabha member and Savarkar devotee, testified against his co-conspirators in exchange for a full pardon. Dr. Parchure, the principal Mahasabha leader in Gwalior, was shown to have provided Nathuram Godse with the pistol used to kill Gandhi. His conviction was overturned on appeal,

⁹³ See for example, S.P. Mookerjee's letters to Patel of 8 and 16 Feb., 4 May, 23 June and 17 July 1948, *Patel Correspondence*, 6: 36, 42, 65-67, 269-70, and 320-21.

⁹⁴ S.P. Mookerjee File 57, SPM Papers, First Instalment.

⁹⁵ J. Nehru to S.P. Mookerjee, 28 January 1948, V. 5, 30-31.

because the prosecution could not prove that he knew of Godse's intentions. V.D.

Savarkar stood trial with the other accused, but his eight months in the dock ended with the court finding that there was "no reason to suppose" he "had any hand" in either of the January 1948 attempts on Gandhi's life.⁹⁶

Savarkar's acquittal absolves neither him nor the Mahasabha of political responsibility for Gandhi's murder. The politics of the Mahasabha—its insistence on defining the role and rights of individuals within the Indian polity by their religious faith, its exaltation of violence and thirst for revenge, its promotion of the noxious notion of communal collective responsibility, and its verbal vendetta against Gandhi—all helped to create conditions in which Gandhi could be assassinated and numerous other acts of communal violence perpetrated. Moreover, as we have seen, in the weeks immediately prior to the assassination, Mahasabha leaders publicly voiced their support for the execution of Gandhi and other Congress leaders. According to the Kapur inquiry into Gandhi's assassination, the atmosphere in the Mahasabhite-bastion of Poona, "was tense," "violence was in the air and rumours of Gandhi's life being in danger were afloat."⁹⁷

During this dissertation we frequently have had cause to cite Mahasabhite invective against Gandhi. The depth of the hostility to Gandhi among Mahasabhites, especially in Maharashtra, and the powerful irrational element in their animus is exemplified by an article written by the future Mahasabha President N.B. Khare. Titled the "Avatar of Aurangzeb" and widely disseminated by the pro-Mahasabha press in late 1946, Khare's article suggested that Gandhi was the reincarnation of the Moghul

⁹⁶ As cited in Keer, *Veer Savarkar*, 415.

⁹⁷ *Gandhi Murder Inquiry*, Part 2, 346.

Emperor Aurangzeb—"the greatest enemy and hater of the Hindus." Having failed to crush the Hindus as a Muslim, Aurangzeb had returned in the form of the ostensibly devout Hindu M.K. Gandhi, or so asserted Khare, the better to lead the Hindus to their destruction. Like Aurangzeb, Gandhi was animated by "an inveterate inner hatred of the Hindoos" and like the Moghul Emperor, he especially "dislikes the Marathas."⁹⁸

Not only did the Mahasabha help school Godse and Apte in their hatred of Gandhi; there is much evidence showing that many in the Mahasabha welcomed the assassination and felt admiration or at least sympathy for Gandhi's assassins. A Benares Hindu Mahasabhaite conceded to this writer that he felt elated on learning that the Mahatma had been assassinated.⁹⁹ Home Minister Patel claimed "reliable reports" from across India showed "an appreciable number of members of the Mahasabha gloated over the tragedy and distributed sweets" in celebration.¹⁰⁰ A Mahasabha initiated defence fund helped pay for legal counsel and motions for all the defendants—including Nathuram Godse, who from the outset admitted he was Gandhi's killer. Hindu Mahasabha General Secretary Ashutosh Lahiry was effusive in his praise of Nathuram Godse's 8 November 1948 court address. "We are all profoundly impressed with the arguments of Godse," wrote Lahiry. "In fact some of my friends were telling me that Godse is a genius. Kindly convey to him our deep appreciation of his arguments and my personal good wishes."¹⁰¹ If Godse's critique of the Congress and Gandhi read like Savarkar's it wasn't simply

⁹⁸ Khare, *My Political Memoirs*, 290-93. That Khare meant his article to be taken in earnest is underscored by his placing of the discussion of it in his memoirs. With evident pride, Khare notes that his Gandhi/Aurangzeb article was "highly talked" of in M.R. Jayakar's household, reproduces it in full, then mentions two instances when an astrologer had accurately predicted major changes in his life.

⁹⁹ Author's interview with Mahendra Pratap, April 1998.

¹⁰⁰ Patel to S.P. Mookerjee, 6 May 1948, *Patel Correspondence*, 6: 66.

¹⁰¹ Lahiry to Ganpat Rai, 2 June 1949, HMS P-117.

because he was a dutiful disciple. According to his brother and co-conspirator, Gopal Godse, Savarkar helped Nathuram Godse compose his court speech.¹⁰²

The December 1949 Hindu Mahasabha session, the first since 1946, denounced the Indian government for refusing to handover the ashes of the hanged assassins, N. Godse and Apte, to their families. But it did not reiterate “the shame and humiliation” that the Mahasabha Working Committee had voiced in February 1948 about the Mahasabhite connections of Gandhi’s killers, nor even condemn the Mahatma’s assassination.¹⁰³

At least by the early 1960s, some veteran Poona Mahasabhites, including Tilak’s grandson and one-time Provincial Congress Committee President G.V.Ketkar were meeting annually to commemorate Godse’s and Apte’s “martyrdom.” When Gopal Godse was release from prison in the fall of 1964, this group feted him. Godse subsequently dedicated himself to working for Hindu political “revival” and eventually rose to the post of All-India Hindu Mahasabha General Secretary

* * *

The Mahasabha assembled an impressive legal team to defend its former president and chief ideologue Savarkar. The team was headed by the current Mahasabha President L.B. Bhopatkar, himself an accomplished barrister and the author of an important legal textbook; and included Jamnadas Mehta a lawyer, former legislator and trade union leader; and Ganpat Rai, an advocate and long-time Mahasabha functionary.

¹⁰² Gopal Godse, *Gandhiji's Murder and After* (Delhi: Surya-Prakashan, 1989) 211-212. The full text of Nathuram Godse’s court speech is in: Nathuram Godse, *May it Please Your Honour*.

¹⁰³ *Calcutta Session of the Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha: Twenty-Eighth Session of the Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha, Calcutta December, 24-26, 1949—Full Proceedings* (Calcutta: Ashutosh Lahiry, General Secretary Reception Committee Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha Calcutta Session, 1950) 28-49, especially 48; “Resolutions of the Hindu Mahasabha, 14-15 February 1948,” *Select Documents: India 1947-50*, V. 1, 550.

Given that Savarkar was charged with the murder of a man venerated by the governing party and much of the public as the father of the Indian nation and given that thousands of Mahasabhaites had been questioned and detained in the aftermath of the Gandhi assassination, it would have been highly surprising had the Mahasabha not treated the prosecution of Savarkar as a political trial. With reason, the Mahasabhaites saw themselves as fighting for their party's reputation and legal status.

What does merit comment is the support the Mahasabhaites lent to the other defendants—money and help in preparing and coordinating their legal arguments.¹⁰⁴ All persons—especially the guilty—merit proper legal defence. But given the Mahasabha's vulnerable position, one would have thought the Mahasabhaites would have been at pains to disassociate Savarkar's case from that of other defendants who were materially tied to the assassination plot. (With the exception of Dr. Parchure, who supplied the murder weapon, eye-witnesses placed all the other defendants at the scene during one or both assassination attempts.)

The explanation Bhopatkar provided Patel, through Mookerjee, as to the Mahasabha's role in the Gandhi Murder trial only underlines the extent to which the organization was implicated in the defence of those who had plotted Gandhi's murder. The Mahasabha President claimed that the All-India Defence Committee supporting Savarkar was entirely independent of the Mahasabha. Yet he admitted that the Mahasabha had issued a circular letter to its branches calling for money to be collected for the Committee. Bhopatkar tried to excuse the Defence Committee's assistance to the other defendants by claiming that the bulk of its money was being spent on Savarkar's case and by implying the Committee's mandate compelled it to help all Mahasabha

¹⁰⁴ Ganpat Rai Oral Transcript, NMML, 77; Gopal Godse, *Gandhiji's Murder and After*, 321-22.

workers in legal difficulty. Omitted from Bhopatkar's account was that the Committee had been established expressly in response to the Gandhi assassination trial. Thus if its rules stipulated an obligation to provide support to all Mahasabhites before the courts, this was because those who had drafted them wanted to assist Savarkar's co-defendants.¹⁰⁵

Only two explanations, neither of them favorable to the Mahasabha, are possible: such was the affinity that many in the Mahasabha felt toward Gandhi's assassins that they were ready to place their organization at risk to assist them; Bhopatkar and others in the Mahasabha leadership thought it wise to buy silence of the accused in the Gandhi murder trial, if not about the assassination, then about Mahasabhite involvement in other acts of violence or plans for violence.

One further point needs to be made about the Gandhi murder trial. Savarkar's legal defence rested on two claims: there was no credible evidence tying him to the murder; the charge that he was a party to the conspiracy to kill Gandhi made no political sense.

Savarkar and his legal team had no difficulty in casting doubt on the approver Badge's claim that he had overheard Savarkar tell Godse and Apte, as they left for Delhi on January 17, 1948, "Come back successful." As Savarkar and his lawyers were quick to point out, even if one accepted Badge's testimony as true, it proved nothing, because

¹⁰⁵ Vallabhbhai Patel to S.P. Mookerjee, 12 June 1948; S.P. Mookerjee to Patel 16 June 1948; S.P. Mookerjee to Patel, 9 Sept. 1948 and enclosure, L.B. Bhopatkar to S.P. Mookerjee, 29 Aug. 1948; Patel to S.P. Mookerjee 10 Sept. 1948, *Patel Correspondence*, 6: 81-83 and 85-87; Gopal Godse, *Gandhiji's Murder and After*, 309; Indra Prakash, Bhopatkar, 105.

there was no evidence to show that Savarkar knew the true purpose of the Hindu Rashtra Dal leaders' Delhi trip.¹⁰⁶

Much less compelling was the "constructive" or political side of Savarkar's defence. Savarkar claimed he could not have been a party to the plot to kill Gandhi, because he had been transformed into a constitutionalist once India became free. Savarkar told the court: "[I] tried to impress on the public mind that first of all the Central government must be rendered strong whatever party may happen to lead it. ... Revolutionary mentality, which was inevitable and justifiable while we were struggling against an alien and armed oppression, must be instantly changed into a constitutional one if we wanted to save our State from dangerous party-strifes and civil wars." Savarkar further contended that in the months prior to the assassination he had been working for a "common front" of the Congress and Hindu Mahasabha and cited as proof his support for Mookerjee joining the government.¹⁰⁷

In fact, as we have seen, Savarkar supported Travancore's abortive independence bid, arguing that reserves of independent Hindu power might prove useful in a future armed conflict between the proponents of a Hindu India and their enemies. Through the Hindu National Front, he tried to develop an alliance with a section of the princes who were scheming—although their schemes proved ephemeral—to resist absorption into a bourgeois-democratic Indian Union. In defiance of the Congress-led government, he hailed the September 1947 Delhi communal carnage and other heinous acts of communal

¹⁰⁶ Keer, *Veer Savarkar*, 412.

¹⁰⁷ Keer, *Veer Savarkar*, 412-13; Gopal Godse, *Gandhiji's Murder and After*, 189. Savarkar's claim that he preached support for the new state and obedience to the government was corroborated by Nathuram Godse. In his statement to the court, Godse said Savarkar's cooperative attitude toward the Congress-led government angered him and contributed to his decision to act outside of the Mahasabha. There is only one problem; Godse's court statement was contrived to show that he alone planned and executed Gandhi's murder, thereby exonerating all the other defendants. It is chock full of untruths (N. Godse, *May it Please Your Honour*, 56-57.)

violence and urged that India be transformed into a Hindu *Rashtra*. In the aftermath of the Delhi events, Savarkar in his own inimical style, gave voice to the extent of his support for India's government and post-colonial state:

Pandit Nehru swaggers on that if the Hindu Sanghathanists persist on in their efforts to establish a Hindu Raj, they would meet with the fate of Hitler and Mussolini. ... [Should the Hindu *sangathanists*] fail in aiming so high, they are prepared to face any fate in the defence of the honour, greatness and glory of Hindudom. But what in case they succeed in establishing a Hindu Raj? What fate should the Pandit and such other traitors to the Hindu Raj deserve?¹⁰⁸

Our aim in reciting these facts is not to suggest that Savarkar was behind the Gandhi assassination, but to underline that much of the Hindu Mahasabha—not just the clique that murdered Gandhi—were unreconciled to India's new bourgeois-democratic political order. And in 1950 when the Mahasabha re-emerged on the all-India political stage, these elements would renew their challenge to India's democratic-secular polity by agitating for India to become a militaristic state bent on the re-annexation of Pakistan.

III: An Ultimate Attempt to Revive the Hindu Mahasabha

The defence of Savarkar preoccupied the Hindu Mahasabha. Indeed, for much of 1948 it was the Mahasabha's sole all-India activity. When a supporter sought help in rallying opposition to the government's proposed reform of Hindu personal law, the Mahasabha General Secretary said he shared the correspondent's concerns but the Mahasabha was too busy with the Gandhi Murder Trial to do anything.¹⁰⁹

The Mahasabha did conduct an important internal debate in 1948. In early August, the Working Committee lifted the ban on political activity that it had imposed when threatened with illegality six months before, but with the qualification that the

¹⁰⁸ *Savarkar Writings*, 555.

¹⁰⁹ Ashutosh Lahiry to Ram Rattan Gidhari Lall, 17 June 1948, HMS P-117.

Mahasabha should shed its communal character by redefining the word Hindu "to include non-Hindus in it."¹¹⁰ The moving force behind this proviso was Mookerjee. The Industry Minister said he would quit the Mahasabha if it remained a political party closed to non-Hindus. Only if the Mahasabha restricted its activities to the cultural sphere, argued Mookerjee, could it justifiably remain exclusively Hindu.¹¹¹ Mookerjee's threat failed to quell a rebellion of the Mahasabha membership. In early November, the Working Committee reaffirmed the Mahasabha's mission as a self-avowedly Hindu communal political party. To Nehru's relief, Mookerjee responded by announcing his resignation from the Mahasabha. Nevertheless, India's Industry Minister did not formally relinquish the Mahasabha Vice-Presidency till he had failed to convince a late December meeting of the Mahasabha All-India Committee that it should sponsor a new right-wing political party open to all Indians, while continuing its ostensibly non-political Hindu *sangathan* work under the Mahasabha name.¹¹²

Mookerjee's resignation did not resolve the issue of the Mahasabha's Hindu membership qualification. It would continue to vex the Mahasabha for the next two and a half years, cause much acrimony, and even lead to talk of a split.¹¹³ The issue was only put to rest in May 1951 when a special Mahasabha conference voted to allow non-Hindus to participate in the Mahasabha's electoral and legislative work, but barred them from primary membership. If the issue proved so intractable, it was because the Congress government repeatedly suggested communal political parties would be outlawed. The

¹¹⁰ Prakash, *Bhopatkar*, 113.

¹¹¹ S.P. Mookerjee to J. Nehru, 28 August 1948, SPM II-IV Instalment, Mookerjee-J. Nehru Correspondence.

¹¹² Prakash, *History of the Hindu Mahasabha*, 1952 Edition, 259-60; J. Nehru to S.P. Mookerjee, 19 November 1948 and n. 2, *SWJN*, 2nd Series, 8: 124; Andersen and Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron*, 126.

¹¹³ Khare, *My Political Memoirs*, 441.

tenor of the debate within the Mahasabha is suggested by a letter from a party worker who was a Lahore-refugee. The Mahasabha should refrain from seeking to physically “exterminate” all Muslims in India, the letter argued, because “such extermination will destroy our community of skilled artisans and thus further accentuate the economic crisis confronting India.”¹¹⁴

Of Mookerjee we will have cause to speak again. But it is important here to briefly consider the nature of his differences with the Hindu Mahasabha majority. Mookerjee’s call for the Mahasabha to abandon its communal membership provision did not mean he was relinquishing the banner of Hindu *Rashtra*. His reasons for opposing the Mahasabha’s communal membership requirement were two. Partition, he believed, had removed the need for an explicitly Hindu communal party because it had drastically reduced Muslim communal political power within India. Hindus now constituted the majority in every Indian province and state, Jammu and Kashmir excepted, and separate Muslim political representation had been abolished by the Constituent Assembly. Secondly, Mookerjee believed the exclusion of non-Hindus was an impediment to wooing the Congress right and emphasizing the Mahasabha’s conservative and anti-Communist—as opposed to anti-Muslim—thrust. Mookerjee outlined his conception of a “national” Hindu politics in a July 1948 letter to Patel. After protesting against the government’s treatment of the Hindu Mahasabha and RSS, Mookerjee said he believed an effort should be made “to canalize” the activities of “all Hindu organizations . . . into lines which will best serve our national interest.” Mookerjee termed the attempts of “aggressive” communalists to strip Muslims of their citizenship rights “disastrous”—i.e. inimical to state stability and public order. But he urged that the government pursue a

¹¹⁴ J.P. Varma to the General-Secretary Hindu Mahasabha, 12 June 1949, HMS P-117.

clandestine policy of keeping Muslims out of key security posts. More importantly, it needed to recognize that Hindu sentiment constituted a bulwark against the Communists, who urgently needed to be “put down,” and others who purportedly threatened Indian unity and independence. By using the Hindu volunteer organizations to secure internal order, the government could free the army for other tasks.¹¹⁵

In the short-term, Mookerjee’s resignation had little impact on the Mahasabha. Far more detrimental was the ongoing state surveillance of, and restrictions on, Mahasabha activity. Many Mahasabha leaders took to decrying the organization to “save their skins,” complained a “poor and humble” party worker.¹¹⁶ Lacking the organizational discipline and ideological unity of the RSS, the Mahasabha proved far less resilient in the face of state repression.

Following Savarkar’s acquittal in February 1949, the effort to revive the Mahasabha was taken up in earnest. At the end of May, it officially resumed public political activity and by year’s end was playing a leading role in an agitation against the Babri Masjid mosque in Ayodhya.¹¹⁷ Although the Ayodhya controversy pre-dates 1949, the smuggling of Hindu idols into the mosque in December 1949 marked a major escalation in a dispute that three decades later would tear a deep wound in the Indian polity. Who smuggled the idols into the mosque is not known. But the local District Magistrate, who defied government instructions that he order the makeshift Hindu shrine dismantled, was subsequently revealed to be a Hindu Mahasabha sympathizer. In 1952

¹¹⁵ S.P. Mookerjee to V. Patel, 17 July 1948, *Patel Correspondence*, 6: 320-22. On Mookerjee’s support for Hindu Rashtra see also Balraj Madhok, *Portrait of a Martyr*, 99-100.

¹¹⁶ Indrajit Sood to N.B. Khare, 3 May 1951, HMS P-132.

¹¹⁷ *Mahasabha’s New Stand* (New Delhi: Ashutosh Lahiry, General Secretary All-India Hindu Mahasabha, 1949) 9; D.E. Smith, *India as a Secular State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963) 474.

his wife won election as a Hindu Mahasabhaite and he himself later sat in both the UP Assembly and Lok Sabha as a member of the Jana Sangh.¹¹⁸

December 1949 also saw the first annual conference of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha since 1946 and only the second in five years. The Calcutta session was opened by V.D. Savarkar and the *Hindutva*-ite ideologue did not disappoint his militant followers. The new motto of the Hindus of India should be “give one more push and tear off Pakistan,” proclaimed Savarkar.¹¹⁹ The call for Pakistan’s re-absorption into *Akhand Hindusthan* was the session’s principal theme. As we saw earlier, the Mahasabha rejected the June 3rd 1947 settlement and vowed there would be no peace till India was re-united. Nevertheless, the December 1949 session did mark a shift in the emphasis that the Mahasabha placed on Pakistan’s liquidation. If hitherto the Mahasabha had stressed the need to transform the Dominion of India into a Hindu *Rashtra*, it now made *Akhand Hindusthan* its rallying cry.¹²⁰

As its new president the Mahasabha chose N.B. Khare. The former Viceroy’s Councillor and Alwar *Dewan* had formally joined the organization in August 1949. Two points need be made about the choice of Khare, a Maratha-speaking Brahmin, to spearhead the Mahasabha’s revival. It showed that power in the Mahasaba continued to be largely rooted in Maharashtra—Savarkar strongly supported Khare’s candidacy—and it indicated that the Mahasabha wanted no truck with Patel and the Congress right wing. Khare was a bitter personal enemy of the Home Minister and had been since Patel had helped orchestrate his removal as Congress Premier of the Central Provinces in 1938.

¹¹⁸ “Ram Janma Bhoomi Episode,” Report of V.G. Deshpande, B.S. Moonje Papers, File 187; J. Nehru to K.G. Mashruwala, 5 March 1950, *SWJN*, 2nd Series, 14, Pt. 1: 445 and n. 2; J. Nehru to Kailas Nath Katju, 22 January 1952, *SWJN*, 2nd Series, 17: 397-98; Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*, 91-96.

¹¹⁹ Prakash, *History of the Hindu Mahasabha*, 1952 Edition, 272.

¹²⁰ Prakash, *History of the Hindu Mahasabha*, 1952 Edition, 272-275.

Khare claims that Patel tried to block his selection as Mahasabha President, then pressed for his removal. That Khare's hostility to Patel was reflective of Mahasabha opinion is shown by the fact that in December 1950 Khare had to personally intervene at the Mahasabha's annual session to secure passage of a resolution lamenting the Indian Home Minister's death.¹²¹

The RSS did not share the Mahasabha's hostility to Patel. Around the same time that the Mahasabha snubbed Patel by anointing a bitter personal enemy as its President, RSS supremo Golwalkar was meeting with India's Home Minister to explore the possibility of his organization forging a working relationship with the government.¹²² According to students of RSS history, after it was unbanned in July 1949 the RSS waited to see how the Patel-Nehru power struggle played out before determining whether to sponsor a rival political party to the Congress.¹²³ Certainly, the RSS had reason to believe that many in the Congress leadership were sympathetic. Although the decision was subsequently overturned at Nehru's insistence, the Congress Working Committee voted in October 1949 to lift the prohibition on RSS cadres joining the Congress.¹²⁴

The Hindu Mahasabha's re-emergence on the all-India stage coincided with a dramatic deterioration in communal relations. The first months of 1950 saw the eruption of mass communal violence in East Pakistan (the former East Bengal) and the flight of hundreds of thousands of Hindus to India. Almost immediately, Muslims in West Bengal became the target of retaliatory attacks. Meanwhile in UP, tens of thousands of Muslims were being "squeezed out" by a climate of hostility and harassment, that included the

¹²¹ Khare, *My Political Memoirs*, 378, 385, 392, 400-01, and 428.

¹²² Patel to J. Nehru, 28 March 1950, *Patel Correspondence*, 10: 18.

¹²³ Andersen and Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron*, 124-25 and 127; Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*, 117.

¹²⁴ Graham, *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics*, 20-21.

Ayodhya agitation, street taunts, petty violence, and official abuse of gun-licensing and evacuee property laws.¹²⁵

The resurgence of communal strife across much of South Asia was closely linked to the trade war that had erupted between India and Pakistan in the fall of 1949, after Pakistan refused to join India in devaluating its currency. The "Rupee War" severely dislocated both countries' economies, with East Pakistan, which was deprived of the market for almost all of its jute, the hardest-hit region.¹²⁶ Subsequently, the Nawab of Dacca and other elite elements in East Pakistan sought to deflect popular discontent over the collapse of jute prices and the corrupt practices of a newly-established jute marketing board onto Marwari traders, thereby provoking the anti-Hindu riots. In a similar vein, Hindu Mahasabhis and others in West Bengal sought to turn frustration and anger over job cuts at the state's jute mills against West Bengal's Muslims.¹²⁷

The communal disturbances and the influx into both countries of large numbers of frightened and embittered refugees added a new and highly combustible element to the Indo-Pakistani conflict. By March 1950 there was a full-blown war crisis, with representatives of both countries trading threats of military action and India deploying large numbers of troops on its border with East Pakistan.

As in 1947, many in the Congress viewed the Indo-Pakistani conflict and the crisis in Hindu-Muslim relations from a communalist perspective. "During the last two and a half years or more," wrote Nehru to India's premiers, "we have gradually drifted,

¹²⁵ For more on what Nehru repeatedly described as the "squeezing out" of Muslims from UP (eg. *SWJN*, 2nd Series, V. 14, Part 2, 268) see *SWJN*, 2nd Series, 14, Part 2: 133-34, 267-69 and 293-295 and 15, Part 1: 206-09.

¹²⁶ Ayesha Jalal, *The State of Martial Rule: The Origins of Pakistan's Political Economy of Defence* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990) 96-97; G.W. Choudhury, *Pakistan's Relations with India, 1947-1966* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1968) 148.

¹²⁷ Jalal, *State of Martial Rule*, 106; G.W. Choudhury, 152.

because of the pressure of circumstances towards a communal reaction to the communal problem.”¹²⁸ For his part, Home Minister Patel indicated support for a further exchange of communal population and a redrawing of the border at Pakistan’s expense.¹²⁹

The Mahasabhites were far and away the most bellicose. Mahasabha President N.B. Khare told a Calcutta press conference that if Nehru would not launch war against Pakistan he should resign. Khare demanded that India’s Prime Minister

immediately order an armed intervention in Pakistan at least to protect the honour of women. If Pakistan resents and there is a war he should go ahead and incorporate East Bengal with the Indian Union and secularize it. ... If he cannot do that he should stand down from the chariot.”¹³⁰

Nehru and sections of the international press soon recognized that the Mahasabhites were pursuing a policy aimed at drawing India into war.¹³¹ This involved both explicit demands that the government take military action against Pakistan and the fomenting of communal conflict by calling for India’s Muslims to be expelled or otherwise made to compensate the Hindu refugees from East Pakistan. In a cabinet note, India’s Prime Minister said the Mahasabhites wanted war “not for the sake of protecting minorities or any like object, but definitely for their own political objective”—*Akhand Hindusthan*. As proof he cited “a responsible authority of the Mahasabha” as saying, “[W]ar will lead to the consummation of the very objective for which we are striving and which had been one of the fundamental issues on which we have differed from the Congress.”¹³²

Organizationally the Mahasabha remained weak. But the party’s intransigence and brazen manipulation of popular fears and animosities made it a pole of opposition. In

¹²⁸ J. Nehru to Chief Ministers, 17 May 1950, *Letters to Chief Ministers*, V. 2, 97.

¹²⁹ Graham, *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics*, 21-22; Jalal, *State of Martial Rule*, 86; G.W. Choudhury, 188.

¹³⁰ As cited in Khare, *My Political Memoirs*, 521.

¹³¹ J. Nehru to B.C. Roy, 28 February 1950, *SWJN*, 2nd Series, 14, Part 1: 213; G.W. Choudhury, 189.

¹³² “The Situation in Bengal,” Note to Cabinet, 23 March 1950, *SWJN*, 2nd Series, 14, Part 1: 142-43.

urging that the activities of the Mahasabha be closely watched and where necessary curbed, Nehru observed, “[W]hen people are excited and their minds are full of hatred and anger, then any lead from the Hindu Mahasabha may lead to mischief. There is plenty of inflammable material all around and a spark may set it alight.”¹³³

The recrudescence of communal strife and the Mahasabha revival fired Nehru’s resolve to find a prompt and peaceful solution to the Indo-Pakistan conflict, at least in its then acute phase. Because Indo-Pakistani relations had become inseparably intertwined with the communal question, war, Nehru concluded, would only strengthen the influence of the Hindu communalists in the country and the Congress, drawing India further into the maelstrom of communal strife. “I think it would be a disaster of the first magnitude for us to have a war on something that necessarily takes the shape of a communal issue. War is disastrous in any event, but much more when it is communal or racial or something like that.”¹³⁴ In a letter to India’s Chief Ministers on the eve of a summit meeting with Pakistani Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, Nehru reiterated that the Hindu Mahasabha was pursuing “a deliberate policy of creating trouble so as to force the hands of Government into declaring war.” This constituted a “challenge” to the government and the Congress that they had to meet head on if they were to remain true to their principles.¹³⁵

After six days of talks in Delhi in early April, the prime ministers of India and Pakistan concluded a pact aimed at avoiding war. The Liaquat Ali Khan-Nehru Pact committed both countries to ensuring the safety and full legal equality of their respective minorities. But it was no less emphatic in upholding the 1947 partition. The Pact

¹³³ J. Nehru to Chief Ministers 1 March 1950, *Letters to Chief Ministers*, V. 2, 37.

¹³⁴ J. Nehru to Chief Ministers, 1 March 1950, *Letters to Chief Ministers*, V. 2, 41.

¹³⁵ J. Nehru to Chief Ministers, 1 April 1950, *Letters to Chief Ministers*, V. 2, 61.

stipulated that the minorities had to look to the governments of the countries in which they resided and held citizenship to redress any and all grievances, and it bound both governments to suppress any agitation that called into question the 1947 border.

Fearing the Mahasabha would try to disrupt the prime ministerial summit, Indian authorities took the offensive, prohibiting the Mahasabha Working Committee from meeting in Delhi during Liaquat Ali Khan's visit. The government then ordered the arrest of many Mahasabha leaders under the Preventive Detention Act when they indicated they intended to defy the ban. Over the next year, Mahasabhaite leaders were frequently interned, arrested and jailed, including Bhopatkar, Deshpande, G.V. Ketkar and Mahant Digvijaynath. Ashutosh Lahiry was jailed for nine months after telling Nehru he would organize armed bands to infiltrate East Pakistan if the Indian government didn't intercede militarily in support of the east Bengal Hindus.¹³⁶

Savarkar was also detained at the time of the Liaquat Ali Khan-Nehru summit and held for three months. To be released, he gave a written undertaking that he would not participate in the Mahasabha's agitation against the April 1950 peace agreement or undertake any political activities for a year. In keeping with this pledge, the 67 year-old Savarkar subsequently resigned his Mahasabha membership.¹³⁷ Nevertheless, he remained the party's revered guide and mentor till his death in 1966.

Unlike in 1948, the RSS escaped relatively unscathed from the Indian government's renewed drive against Hindu communal agitation. For what it's worth, Patel praised the RSS for its restraint, telling a meeting of Congress MPs in late March that Golwalkar was "generally conforming to my advice of restricting himself to cultural

¹³⁶ Khare, *My Political Memoirs*, 393-395; Prakash, *History of the Hindu Mahasabha*, 1952 Edition, 276-77; "Notes on Visit to Calcutta," *SWJN*, 2nd Series, V. 14, Part 1: 116-17; Keer, *Veer Savarkar*, 429.

¹³⁷ Keer, *Veer Savarkar*, 432-33; Prakash, *Hindu Mahasabha Its Contribution*, 99.

or social matters and advising his followers to support Government.”¹³⁸ Nehru’s correspondence indicates that in 1950 he shared Patel’s perception that the Mahasabha was “a greater danger than the RSS.”¹³⁹ In his letters to the state Chief Ministers, Nehru repeatedly voiced concern about the Hindu Mahasabha, but only rarely mentioned the RSS or its newspaper, *Organiser*.¹⁴⁰

No doubt the two organizations’ quite different modes of operation had something to do with this. The Hindu Mahasabha was a rival political party to the Congress; the RSS maintained that it was a cultural organization and used the secrecy that cloaked its activities to promote an aura of militancy and evade state scrutiny. That said, it does appear that the RSS was ready to cede to the Mahasabha leadership of the 1950 anti-Pakistan and anti-Muslim agitation. There were probably several reasons for this. The RSS was unsure about what role it wanted to play in India’s official politics. Second, the RSS had confronted the government head-on in December 1948-January 1949, when it had mounted a civil disobedience campaign to protest the ban on its activities and Golwalkar’s detention. As a result, thousands of RSS cadre had been detained. Having only recently been unbanned and under conditions in which its leader was on friendly terms with the Home Minister, the RSS likely calculated that it made sense to let the Mahasabha take the lead and bear the brunt of any government backlash. The Mahasabhites, by contrast, appear to have reflected little, if at all, on the wisdom of openly challenging the government so soon after their being the object of widespread public opprobrium and state mistrust for their ties to Gandhi’s assassins.

¹³⁸ Patel to J. Nehru, 28 March 1950, *Patel Correspondence*, 10: 18.

¹³⁹ Patel to J. Nehru, 28 March 1950, *Patel Correspondence*, 10: 18.

¹⁴⁰ See J. Nehru, *Letters to Chief Ministers, 1947-64*, V. 2.

The speed with which the Mahasabha came into open conflict with the government once it resumed its political activities underscores its communal radicalism and volatility, as well as the depth of the antagonism within Mahasabha circles to the Congress and its bourgeois reform program.

The Hindu Mahasabha was far from alone in condemning the April 1950 accord between India and Pakistan. The West Bengal press and political elite were almost unanimously opposed and the two Bengalis in the Union cabinet, Shyama Prasad Mookerjee and K.C. Neogy, quit in protest as soon as its details become known.¹⁴¹ There was also a strong undercurrent of opposition among Congressmen elsewhere in India, especially once it became evident that the Liaquat Ali Khan-Nehru Pact was having little beneficial impact on the Hindus of East Pakistan.

The re-eruption of communal violence and the Indo-Pakistani war crisis once again put the political partnership of Patel and Nehru to a severe test.¹⁴² Patel's distress at Mookerjee's resignation and his personal affection for, and political affinity, with the former Mahasabha President are exemplified by the letter that he wrote Mookerjee on learning the Industry Minister was resigning from the government. After praising Mookerjee for sparing "no pains to serve your country" and expressing confidence "that no action" of his would "do any harm to the country," Patel declared, "I must not conceal from you the fact I shall miss you ..." But whilst the Home Minister lamented Mookerjee's departure and had reservations about India's latest accommodation with Pakistan, he publicly defended the Liaquat Ali Khan-Nehru agreement and worked to

¹⁴¹ Nehru to Chief Ministers, 15 April 1950, *Letters to Chief Ministers*, V. 2, 67.

¹⁴² J. Nehru to Patel, 26 March 1950 and Patel to J. Nehru 28 March 1950, *Patel Correspondence*, 10: 9-22.

ensure its implementation, arguing that failure to uphold it would compromise the authority of the government and state.¹⁴³

Having broken with the government, Mookerjee was now free to explore the prospects for creating a new political vehicle to challenge the Congress from the right. Not surprisingly, among his first steps was to approach his former Mahasabha comrades. At an informal meeting in mid-summer 1950, Mookerjee pressed Khare and several other prominent Mahasabhites to fold the Mahasabha into a new political party that he and the RSS were resolved to build. Khare, according to his own account, dismissed this proposal out of hand. "Your new party," he told Mookerjee, "is just in the air yet. Its programme is also not chalked out. How can I wind up an organised old party and join your party under these conditions?"¹⁴⁴

For many Mahasabhite militants the fact that their party had run afoul of a government that they held to be an appeaser of the Muslims and had to face a gauntlet of restrictions and bans was proof of the righteousness of their cause and the merit of their tactics. They were fighting the good fight. But among the businessmen and other notables who patronized the Mahasabha there was considerable sentiment in favor of Mookerjee's initiative to create a new right-wing populist party that would harness Hindu communal political sentiment, but could not be so readily stigmatized as "communal" and a tool of vested interests. Key among these were the president of the Punjab National Bank, Lala Yodh Raj, his brother, Balraj Bhalla, and Mauli Chandra Sharma, the former *Dewan* and

¹⁴³ J. Nehru to Chief Ministers, 15 April 1950, *Letters to Chief Ministers*, V. 2, 71.

¹⁴⁴ Khare, *My Political Memoirs*, 427.

Chamber of Princes functionary who had helped initiate the now defunct Hindu National Front.¹⁴⁵

The birth story of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, including the respective roles played by Mookerjee and the RSS, has been told by several scholars and need not be repeated here.¹⁴⁶ Two points, however, do merit mention. Support for the new party was especially weak in Maharashtra. Not until a year after the first post-independence general election was a Maharashtra provincial unit of the Jana Sangh founded. The Jana Sangh's difficulties in Maharashtra can be attributed to the strength of Mahasabha influence and the reluctance of the RSS's Maratha "old guard" to have their organization formally connected to a political party.¹⁴⁷ The second point concerns the defection of growing numbers of Mahasabhites to the Jana Sangh. Whilst some of these recruits were Mahasabha "moderates," it would be wrong to portray the cleavage that Mookerjee's new party initiative caused within the Mahasabha and its periphery as one between more and less strident brands of Hindu communalism. First and foremost, because the RSS, which provided the Jana Sangh with the majority of its activists, was itself a fount of communal extremism. Second, because some prominent Mahasabhite moderates, whether for reasons of personal ambition, organizational loyalty, or mistrust of the RSS, rejected Mookerjee's overtures. Take the example of N.C. Chatterjee. In the wake of Gandhi's assassination, he had taken shelter in a Calcutta High Court Judgeship.¹⁴⁸ On coming out of political retirement in 1950, he took the helm of the West Bengal Provincial Hindu

¹⁴⁵ Graham, *Hindu Nationalism*, 27-28 and 57-58.

¹⁴⁶ See Myron Weiner, *Party Politics in India: The Development of a Multi-Party System* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957), 177-198; Bruce Graham, *Hindu Nationalism*, 5-32; Craig Baxter, *The Jana Sangh: A Biography of an Indian Political Party*. (Bombay: OUP, 1971) 54-78.

¹⁴⁷ Weiner, 190-92 and Andersen and Damle, *Brotherhood in Saffron*, 109 and 123-128.

¹⁴⁸ J. Nehru to Vallabhbhai 7 May 1948 and 12 May 1948, *SWJN*, 6: 51, 52 and n. 3, and 382.

Sabha, rather than joining Mookerjee's campaign to found a new right-wing populist party.

In certain *fora* the Jana Sangh was at pains to distance itself from the popular image of the Mahasabha as a communalist party of the privileged. But as Jean Curran found, while many RSS activists derided the Mahasabha as a party of "old fogies" and *Rai Bahadurs*, the one Mahasabhite whom most held in high regard was Savarkar—the same Savarkar who had been the foremost ideologue of extreme Hindu communalism, the keenest advocate of a Hindu-British alliance, and staunchest defender of the princes and the landlords as pillars of Hindudom.¹⁴⁹

Both before and after the 1951-52 elections, talk of a merger between the Mahasabha and Jana Sangh proceeded alongside much squabbling and sniping. The lack of clear programmatic differences between the two parties only added to the bitterness, as their respective cadres tried to justify their party's separate existence.¹⁵⁰ Some Mahasabhites reproached the Jana Sangh for having betrayed the Hindu communal political cause by using the less-communally charged Bharat rather than Hindusthan in their party name and program. Writing in the *Hindu Outlook*, a Jana Sangh supporter conceded that there was little to choose between the two parties' programs, but argued his RSS-allied party had the better men.¹⁵¹

The need for fresh elections had long been a Hindu Mahasabha refrain. Blinded by their own rhetoric, many Mahasabhites genuinely believed the electorate would vindicate their stand against the Congress. At the very least, they expected popular anger

¹⁴⁹ Jean Curran, *Militant Hinduism in Indian Politics: a study of the R.S.S.* (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1951) 64; Weiner, 184-85.

¹⁵⁰ On the lack of substantive programmatic differences between the Hindu Mahasabha and the Jana Sangh see Weiner, 210-13.

¹⁵¹ *Hindu Outlook*, 8 July and 12 August 1951.

over the government's failure to significantly improve living standards, widespread corruption, and the plight of the 1947 and 1950 refugees would ensure that the Mahasabha emerged as a serious opposition force in India's legislatures. In reality, the 1951-52 All-India and state elections proved as big a disaster for the Mahasabha as the 1945-46 elections, with the only difference that in 1951-52 the deflation of the Mahasabhites' hopes and expectations was spread over a longer period.

In June 1951, Hindu Mahasabha Organizing Secretary V.G. Deshpande announced that the party would contest roughly 2000 seats at the Centre and state level.¹⁵² Actually, it stood candidates in barely a tenth that number. The Mahasabha's 31 candidates for the national parliament polled 1,003,034 votes—the eleventh largest vote total—representing .95 percent of the All-India popular vote. Four Mahasabhites were elected to the Lok Sabha—one in a by-election triggered by V.G. Deshpande having successfully contested two seats. The Mahasabha contested 211 of the 3,280 state assembly seats. Twenty Mahasabhites emerged victorious—11 in Madhya Bharat, 4 in West Bengal, 2 in Rajasthan and 1 each in Bhopal, Delhi, and Uttar Pradesh.¹⁵³

The Mahasabha's claim to be the party of India's Hindus was directly challenged by two other parties.

The Ram Rajya Parishad (RRP) of Swami Karapatri stood as the party of orthodox Hinduism. Whilst opposition to cow-killing and to the Congress' attempt to modernize Hindu personal law were in keeping with Mahasabha policy, the RRP's

¹⁵² *Hindu Outlook*, 10 June 1951.

¹⁵³ Election Commission of India, *Report on the First General Elections*, V. 1 (Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1955); S.V. Kogekar and Richard L. Park, ed., *Reports on the Indian General Elections, 1951-52* (Bombay: Popular Book Depot, 1956); Asoka Mehta, *The Political Mind of India: An Analysis of the Results of the General Election* (Bombay: Socialist Party, 1952) 10, 12 and 14; W.H. Morris-Jones, *The Government and Politics of India* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1971) 184; Weiner, 170 and 196.

explicit defence of a division of labor based on hereditary caste and its opposition to Untouchable membership were not.¹⁵⁴ Nationally the RRP gained only negligible support, but in Rajasthan and Central India it became the vehicle through which sections of the princes and landlords sought to oppose Congress rule and the abolition of *zamindari*. Long-time Mahasabha leader B.G. Khaparde became RRP President in Madhya Pradesh (the former Central Provinces).¹⁵⁵

Of much greater significance was the bleeding of Mahasabha support to the Jana Sangh. Although officially launched as an all-India party only in October 1951, the Jana Sangh quickly emerged as the most dynamic of the Hindu nationalist parties, standing 93 candidates for the Lok Sabha and contesting more than three times as many state assembly seats as the Mahasabha. Prominent Mahasabhites who participated in the Jana Sangh's founding included: M.G. Chitnavis, a patron of the late B.S. Moonje and great C.P. landlord; Chand Karan Sarda, a longtime Mahasabha Working Committee member; former All-India Mahasabha Secretary Manorajan Choudhury; and fellow Bengalis, Major Bardhan and Professor Dev Prasad Ghosh. (The last-named would be the Jana Sangh's national president for four years in the late 1950s.) Playing a role similar to that Maheshwar Dayal had played in the 1945-46 election campaign, Gokul Chand Narang and *Rai Bahadur* Sohan Lal used their control of the Mahasabha's election board in north-west India to prevent any Mahasabhites from filing nominating papers in the Punjab. They were promptly rewarded with Jana Sangh nominations.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Weiner, 174-75; Baxter, *The Jan Sangh*, 78-79 and 132.

¹⁵⁵ S.V. Kogekar and Richard L. Park, *Reports on the Indian General Elections, 1951-52*, 73 and 82; Baxter, *The Jana Sangh*, 79.

¹⁵⁶ See HMS P-132, especially Indra Prakash to Om Prakash Kahol 3 November 1951; Lachman Das 15 November 1951 and Inder Sen 11 December 1951; and Babu Ram Sharma to Captain Kaishap Chander [Keshab Chander], 12 Dec. 1951. Also, Baxter, *The Jana Sangh*, 98.

The Jana Sangh fell far short of its own objectives for the 1951-52 elections, winning just 3 Lok Sabha seats and 3.2 million votes.¹⁵⁷ But because it won more than 3 percent of the national popular vote—its total was 3.1 percent—the Jana Sangh was subsequently recognized by India's Electoral Commission as one of only four All-India or national parties.¹⁵⁸ Mookerjee was able to parlay the Jana Sangh's relatively strong popular vote total and his personal reputation as an effective parliamentarian into the post of leader of the National Democratic Front—a parliamentary coalition of anti-Congress parties that included, among others, the Hindu Mahasabha, the Akali Dal, the Orissa-based Ganatantra Parishad, and the Tamil Nad Toilers' Party.

Many of the big landlords of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar who in the past had been active in the Mahasabha chose to oppose the Congress through other political vehicles. The first president of the Jana Sangh's UP unit was Krishna Pal Singh, the Rao of Awagarh, a former president of the UP Provincial Hindu Sabha and the All-India Kshatriya Mahasabha.¹⁵⁹ Former Mahasabhites figured large in the UP Praja Party, whose principal platform plank was opposition to zamindari abolition. Veteran Mahasabhites in the Praja Party leadership included Kunwar Guru Narain, the Rani of Sherkot, Yuvraj Dutt Singh (the Raja of Oel) and the only two Prajists who won seats in the UP Assembly, the Rajas of Payagpur and Jagmanpur.¹⁶⁰ In Bihar, Raja Kamakhya

¹⁵⁷ Balraj Madhok, *Portrait of a Martyr*, 121.

¹⁵⁸ Election Commission of India, *Report on the First General Elections*, V. 1, 92.

¹⁵⁹ Baxter, *The Jana Sangh*, 73 and Graham, *Hindu Nationalism*, 182.

¹⁶⁰ Reeves, *Landlords and Governments in Uttar Pradesh*, 300-306; Baxter, *The Jana Sangh*, 220; *Mahratta*, 21 April 1944; *Leader*, 22 May 1947; V.G. Deshpande to S.P. Mookerjee, 6 March 1944, HMS C-51.

Narain Singh of Ramgarh, one of the state's biggest landlords and a longtime Mahasabha leader and patron, formed his own Janata Party.¹⁶¹

Although the Congress won a massive majority in the Lok Sabha, its 45 percent share of the popular vote indicated its position was far from unassailable. Parties that appealed to regional pride and discontent or opposed the Congress from the left proved, however, to have far greater electoral pull than the Hindu right. All told, the three Hindu parties won 6.4 million votes or 6% of the popular vote and captured 85 state assembly seats, of which 64 were in the former princely states.¹⁶² By contrast, the two Socialist Parties won more than 16 percent of the popular vote, while the Communist Party captured a 3.3 percent vote share and 26 Lok Sabha seats, making it the second largest party in parliament.

Nehru made opposition to Hindu communalism the central thrust of the Congress election campaign.¹⁶³ This was due to Nehru's conviction that the *Hindutva*-ite agitation for Hindu *Rashtra* and *Akhand Bharat* constituted the greatest threat to India's social cohesion and national unity. But the focus on the Hindu communalist menace was also good politics. It served to bolster the Congress's claim to promote national unity and class reconciliation against opponents both to its right and left and detracted attention from the government's failures on the economic front. Nehru's electoral crusade against Hindu communalism also put his rivals in the Congress right-wing on the defensive. Shortly before the election call, Nehru had forced the resignation of Tandon, who with

¹⁶¹ D. Thakur, *Politics of Land Reforms in India* (New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers, 1989) 44 and 178-81.

¹⁶² Weiner, 170 and 196.

¹⁶³ W.H. Morris-Jones, 94. In both internal party communications and his election speeches, Nehru repeatedly designated the Hindu Mahasabha and other Hindu communal parties as the Congress' principal opponents and communalism as the greatest threat to the country. Eg. *SWJN*, 2nd Series, 16, Part 2: 38-39, 73-75, 80-87 94-97, 112-119.

the support of the now dead Patel had captured the Congress Presidency in the summer of 1950.

The 1951-52 elections once again demonstrated the Mahasabha's right-wing politics and elite social base. In June 1949, when the Mahasabha had re-emerged from more than a year of public inactivity, it had tried to re-cast its image. The *Mahasabha's New Stand* redefined Hindu *Rahstra* to include support for "a new social and economic order." It advanced purportedly "leftist" policies "primarily intended to benefit the landless" and "that section of the middle class who are dependent on fixed monthly income," while warning that the "real menace before the country today is the rising tide of communism."¹⁶⁴ An early version of the Mahasabha's new programme declared support for redistribution of land to the *kisans* and landless, the gradual collectivization of agriculture, financial support to the unemployed, limits on the concentration of capital, and the nationalization of all key industries, credit and means of transport and communication.¹⁶⁵ But as the Mahasabha gathered strength and N.B. Khare, N.C. Chatterjee, and other veteran politicians wrested program-writing from *Hindutva*-ite ideologues like V.G. Deshpande and Ashutosh Lahiry, the "Hindu socialist" phrases were expunged. The Mahasabha's 1951 Election Manifesto affirmed the party's belief in the "sanctity of private property," attacked the abolition of *zamindari* and *jagirdari* as of no benefit to the tillers of the soil, said the Mahasabha would interfere with landlords' proprietary rights only when they neglected cultivation, and promised business that taxes and controls would be reduced. Industries essential to war production would be owned by

¹⁶⁴ *Mahasabha's New Stand* (New Delhi: Ashutosh Lahiry, General Secretary, All India Hindu Mahasabha, 1949) 5-8 and 15.

¹⁶⁵ "All-India Hindu Mahasabha: New Political & Economic Programme. As outlined by the Working Committee at its meeting held at New Delhi on the 6th and 7th November, 1948," Lahiry Papers, Statements.

the state as part of the Mahasabha's scheme to make India "a first rate military power." The Election Manifesto made no mention of measures to procure land for the landless or alleviate poverty and hunger. To the Scheduled Castes, who then as now make up a grossly disproportionate share of the landless and illiterate, the Mahasabha offered an empty pledge to pay "special attention" to their development. Lamented Mahasabha General Secretary Lahiry, "Whatever goodwill we earned by adopting a forward economic program ... was partly spoiled by modifications in our Central Election Manifesto."¹⁶⁶

On the campaign hustings, Mahasabhite speakers almost completely ignored socio-economic questions and instead focussed on those issues that excited their supporters: condemnation of the Congress for "appeasing" the Muslims and presiding over India's partition; opposition to the Hindu Code Bill, which was meant to reform laws relating to divorce, adoption and inheritance; and calls for a policy of reciprocity against Pakistan and for the militarization of India with the implication that a Mahasabha government would quickly restore the integrity of *Akhand Hindusthan*.

The Hindu Mahasabha scored by far its best electoral showing in Madhya Bharat, which had been formed in 1948 by the fusion of Gwalior, Indore and 23 smaller Central Indian states. The Mahasabha captured more than half of all its seats—2 Lok Sabha and 11 state assembly seats—in Madhya Bharat and all of these were in constituencies that fell within the borders of the former princely state of Gwalior. Dr. Parchure, the long-time Gwalior Hindu Sabha leader who had stood trial for Gandhi's murder, narrowly

¹⁶⁶ *Election Manifesto of the Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha as adopted by the Working Committee at its meeting held in August 1951 in New Delhi* (New Delhi: Office Secretary, Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha, 1951); A. Lahiry to Savarkar, April 1952, Lahiry Papers, Savarkar Correspondence; Lahiry to Prakasha Kahol, 2 May 1951, HMS P-132.

missed capturing a state assembly seat, but his lawyer was among the victorious Mahasabha candidates.

From its beginnings in the late 1930s, the Gwalior Rajya Hindu Sabha had enjoyed the patronage of the Angre family, Gwalior's largest *jagirdars*. Faced with the threat of *jagirdari* abolition, Chandrojirao Angre decided to take a more prominent role in Mahasabha affairs and his intervention proved pivotal to the Mahasabha's electoral performance in Gwalior. In 1951 Angre got himself appointed one of two Mahasabha zonal organizers for four states formed from princely India—Madhya Bharat, Bhopal, Rajasthan and Vindhya Pradesh. By October, he was boasting that he had “assembled about forty *jagirdars* and petty rulers to stand in the elections under the banner of the Hindu Mahasabha.” Because of their strong showing in Madhya Pradesh, the Mahasabhites were subsequently able to secure Angre's election to the Indian parliament's upper house.¹⁶⁷ Angre's nomination, complained Ashutosh Lahiry, showed to “what extent our top-ranking leaders would go to placate vested interests ...”¹⁶⁸ Apart from Madhya Pradesh, the Mahasabha won more than 10 percent of the popular vote in the Union or state assembly elections in just two other states, both of them formed out of former princely India—Saurashtra, a union of the former Kathiawar or Western Indian states, and Bhopal.

* * *

The 1951-52 elections were the third shattering blow the Hindu Mahasabha had suffered in the six years since the end of World War II and effectively eliminated it as a

¹⁶⁷ Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*, 109-111; Kogekar and Park, *Reports on the Indian General Elections 1951-52*, 195-97; Election Commission, *Report on the First General Elections in India, 1951-52*, V. 1.

¹⁶⁸ Ashutosh Lahiry to Savarkar, April 1952, Lahiry Papers, Savarkar Correspondence.

significant force in Indian politics. In each subsequent election its meagre seat and popular vote totals shrank further.

A smattering of Mahsabha notables re-emerged in the Congress. Sir J.P. Srivastava—he who had so jocularly talked of Gandhi starving himself to death—was elected in 1952 to the upper house of India's parliament, the *Rajya Sabha*, on the Congress ticket. Kumar Gangand Sinha, for decades one of the principal leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha in Bihar, was named Bihar's Education Minister after the 1957 state elections.¹⁶⁹

The bulk of the Hindu Mahasabha members were absorbed into the Jana Sangh. There were merger talks between the two parties in 1953 and again in 1955-56, but the RSS, whose weight within the Jana Sangh's councils grew appreciably following Mookerjee's death in June 1953, calculated that it was strong enough to dictate the terms of any merger. For their part, Savarkar and his acolytes continued to insist on the need for an exclusively Hindu party—no matter that by 1956 the Mahasabha's total membership was barely a third of what it had been in 1951.¹⁷⁰

Although the Mahasabha members were chagrined by their rivals' disdain for their party's tradition, the pull of the Jana Sangh proved irresistible. Captain Keshub Chander, for many years the party treasurer and later the head of the Punjab State Hindu Mahasabha, went over to the Jana Sangh at the time of the 1957 elections. Hardayal Devgun, long a key Mahasabha organizer switched allegiances in 1961. Much of the Mahasabha in Madhya Pradesh, including several state legislators, defected to the Jana

¹⁶⁹ Shashishekhar Jha, *Political Elite in Bihar* (Bombay: Vora, 1972) 87-88; D. Thakur, *Politics of Land Reforms in India*, 187.

¹⁷⁰ For an extensive discussion of the 1953 merger attempt see Weiner, Chapter 10; *Hindu Outlook*, 31 January, 28 February and 20 March 1956; Baxter, *The Jana Sangh*, 132-33.

Sangh in 1963. V.G. Deshpande, the Mahasabha President in 1961 and 1963, crossed-over to the Jana Sangh in 1966. To win re-election, the last Mahasabha in the *Lok Sabha*, Mahant Digvijaynath, eventually followed suit.¹⁷¹

Like its dilapidated New Delhi property, the Hindu Mahasabha lives on as a relic. The communal hatred of its contemporary leaders has not dimmed, however. In a 1998 interview, its then President, Dinesh Chandra Tyagi, and Mahendra Pratap, the editor of *Hindu Sabha Varta* and a Mahasabhaite since the early 1940s, explained to this writer that the RSS and the Bharatiya Janata Party (the Jana Sangh's successor party) have betrayed Hindus and the Hindu nation because they have become reconciled to a Muslim presence in India.¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ Baxter, *The Jana Sangh*, 133; Des Raj Goyal, *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh*, 92.

¹⁷² Author's interviews with Mahendra Pratap and Dinesh Chandra Tyagi, April 1998.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

A key concern animating this dissertation has been the need to historicize the scholarly discussion of Hindu nationalism and especially of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha. Chapters Two through Eight have filled a major gap in the political history of twentieth-century India by tracing the Mahasabha's development from the late 1930s, when it metamorphosed into India's first Hindu nationalist party, through the 1952 elections, when the newly-formed Jana Sangh supplanted the Mahasabha as the principal party of the Hindu right. Perforce, our narrative of the Mahasabha's emergence, crystallization and shattering has privileged interconnections that have hitherto escaped or largely escaped scholarly inquiry. These include: the ideological affinity that V.D. Savarkar, Bhai Parmanand and other important Mahasabha leaders felt for European fascism; the British Raj's patronage of the Hindu Mahasabha during the Second World War; the Mahasabha's attempts to court B.R. Ambedkar and other Untouchable political leaders; and the shaky and largely unacknowledged alliance that the Congress formed with the Mahasabha in 1947.

This study has also highlighted how broader political processes, including increasing subaltern dissent, were refracted in the upper-class and upper-caste Mahasabha. From this vantage point, three broad conclusions about the 1937-52 period emerge. The politics of India were in much greater flux than is suggested by the traditional historiographic narratives, which focus, variously, on the orderly transfer of *Raj* sovereignty, the Congress's long but irrepressible march to power, and the sudden "national awakening" of South Asia's Muslims. Seminal as was the August 1947 independence and partition, many pivotal issues concerning the shape of India's

emerging socio-political order would only be resolved in the turbulent period between “Freedom at Midnight” and the confirmation of Congress dominance in the 1952 elections. A powerful egalitarian current swept across South Asia in the final decade of British rule.

In situating the Mahasabha in India’s evolving social and political landscape, our principal concern has been to deepen our understanding of the compulsions under which the Mahasabha emerged as a political party, the bases of its support, its role in promoting communal political polarization, its influence and impact on the Congress, and the reasons for its ultimate demise. In the few remaining pages, I will revisit and expand on several of these themes.

For obvious reasons scholars have focussed on what was most distinctive about the Hindu Mahasabha—its promotion of a Hindu supremacist vision of the Indian polity—generally to the exclusion of any investigation of the Mahasabha’s interaction with the *Raj*, Congress and other political forces. This thesis has sought to provide a corrective. While emphasizing the Mahasabha’s contribution to the propagation of *Hindutva* and documenting its role in promoting communal conflict, including its emergence in 1947 as the ideologue of anti-Muslim ethnic-cleansing, this study has demonstrated that communal and class politics were intertwined. The Mahasabha’s opposition to a territorial definition of the Indian polity rooted in liberal notions of civic equality was the cutting edge of a more general, class-based opposition to key tenets of the Congress’ bourgeois-democratic reform program and strategy of controlled mass mobilization. From the mid-1920s, Mahasabhite concerns about the INC’s emphasis on Hindu-Muslim unity were coupled with complaints that civil disobedience and boycotts

were allowing the Muslims' to gain the *Raj*'s favor while schooling the masses in "law breaking."

As an ideological current, Hindu nationalism developed in reaction against the inclusive definition of the Indian nation championed by the Congress. From a political standpoint, the Mahasabha's transformation from a movement promoting the ostensibly non-political program of Hindu *sangathan* and into a political party was more than just a reaction to the intensifying communal-political power struggle.

Unquestionably, the Congress' failure to campaign against the Communal Award angered some caste Hindus, especially in the Muslim-majority provinces. But fears of rising socialist sentiment in the Congress and increasing worker, *kisan* and Depressed Class militancy played a decisive role in the decision of a layer of Mahasabhites to sever their longstanding ties to the Congress in 1936-37. For like reasons many among the north Indian landed-gentry made the Mahasabha their principal political vehicle, following the rout of the landlord parties in the 1937 provincial elections.

Under Savarkar's leadership, the Mahasabha denounced the 1937-39 Congress provincial ministries as "communistic" for seeking to curb landlord power and encouraged the princes to suppress the states' people's movement. Following the outbreak of the Second World War, it sought and was granted representation on the Viceroy's Council in reward for its pro-war and anti-Congress agitation. As communal and class conflict increased in the final months of the *Raj*, the Mahasabha grew still more communally radical, vowing never to accept Partition, campaigning for a Hindu *Raj*, and supporting the Alwar *darbar*'s campaign to clear the state of its Meo Muslim population,

while associating itself with princely and landlord schemes to subvert India's new political order, including Travancore's bid for independence.

For the most part, the Mahasabha refrained from giving any positive socio-economic content to its call for a Hindu *Raj*. Savarkar, drawing on fascist models, at times presented a picture of a highly regimented Hindusthan, in which the state would devote much of its resources to developing government-owned military industries and providing all Hindus with military training. Otherwise a Hindu nationalist government was to hold private property as inviolate, limiting intervention in the economy to ensuring that the "national interest" was not threatened by "selfish" worker demands and strikes. Others Mahasabhites depicted *Hindutva* as an ideology which would reconcile India's indigenous traditional values—including the reputedly competition- and strife-free social order envisaged in the four *varna* model—with industrial capitalist society, thereby enabling India to avoid the Western "cancers" of individualism and class conflict. In either version *Hindutva* was a right-wing, political vision self-consciously directed against the "foreign" doctrines of liberalism, socialism, and communism.

Ultimately, the Hindu Mahasabha rested on quite disparate fractions of elite groups—sections of the Bengali *bhadralok*, the Hindu urban commercial classes of north-west India, the Chitpavan Brahmins of Maharashtra, the princes and the big landlords. These groups were differently affected by the rise of Muslim communal-political power, had divergent socio-economic interests, and played varying roles in the *Raj*'s political system. What they shared was a sense that the widening of electoral politics and the politicization and radicalization of the subaltern classes was placing their privileged position at risk. A central conclusion of this thesis is that there was a close connection

between the political-organizational articulation of Hindu nationalism through the Hindu Mahasabha and opposition to a powerful democratizing and egalitarian thrust in Indian politics that had arguably been growing since the end of the First World War, but reached its height in the last decade of British rule

Bipin Chandra has argued against using the term "Hindu nationalist" in reference to the Mahasabhaites, on the grounds that they were not nationalists, but loyalists who invariably opposed the struggle for Indian independence.¹ I do not fully subscribe to Chandra's argument, since it is based on an exaggerated estimate of the oppositional or anti-imperialist character of the Congress. As David Arnold has explained, the Congress was both the *Raj*'s greatest opponent and most promising partner.² Nevertheless, this study has substantiated the claim that the Hindu Mahasabha emerged as a prominent *Raj* collaborator. Consequent with its emergence as a Hindu nationalist party, the Mahasabha grew increasingly emphatic in its opposition to any Congress challenge to British rule, supporting the formation of the interim ministries in 1937 so as to ensure that the new British-dictated constitution did not break down, and opposing outright the 1942 Quit India movement. The principal Hindu nationalist ideologues, Savarkar and Bhai Parmanand, became the foremost advocates of an Anglo-Hindu alliance and aggressively pursued such an alliance during the Second World War, although the British, while ready to promote the Mahasabha, would not do so at the expense of their patronage of the Muslim communal political elite. The Mahasabhaites' wartime support for the *Raj* was no mere maneuver. It conformed with the precepts of Hindu nationalism—that the Muslims were the principal enemies of the Hindu nation and that British rule was but an

¹ Bipin Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India*, 2nd Revised Edition (Delhi: Vikas, 1984) 99.

² David Arnold, *The Congress in Tamilnad: nationalist politics in South India, 1919-1937* (London: Curzon Press, 1977) 6.

interruption in the thousand year-old struggle between Hindu and Muslim for supremacy on the Indian subcontinent.

This dissertation has refuted both the Indian and Pakistani national historiographic schools' conceptualizations of the Congress-Mahasabha relationship. While the former holds that the Congress was resolute in its opposition to Hindu communalism, the latter charges that the Congress practiced what the Mahasabha preached. This study has shown that the dominant wing of the Mahasabha—that associated with Savarkar—was militantly anti-Congress. Yet this did not preclude collaboration between the two organizations, particularly in Bengal, where Shyama Prasad Mookerjee was intent on forging a *bhadralok*-led Hindu communal-political bloc.

Prior to the 1952 elections, the Congress never treated the Mahasabha as a political untouchable. The Congress leadership routinely welcomed Mahasabha defectors, and in 1945-46, when the Communists were being shunted out the backdoor on the grounds that they had supported the British during the war, Mahasabhite-defectors were being greeted at the Congress front door, notwithstanding the Mahasabha's war-time alliance with the *Raj*. During the 1942 Cripps mission, in 1945 at the Simla conference, and again in 1947 when constructing the first post-independence cabinet, the Congress wanted the Mahasabha represented in government. Behind this attitude lay two impulses: the Hindu bias of sections of the Congress and the attempt of others, Gandhi in particular, to pursue a policy of engagement with communalists in the hopes of restraining them.

In both the Hindu Mahasabha and the Congress there were significant elements, particularly after the Quit India movement, that wanted closer cooperation if not a formal link between the two parties. In Bengal, the Congress initially entered into an electoral

pact with the Mahasabha for the 1945 Central Assembly elections, and in 1947 it joined with the Mahasabha in insisting that the communal partition of Bengal be a condition of the transfer of power agreement. Two key factors are generally overlooked in accounts of Nehru's ultimately successful battle to prevent the Mahasabahites and RSS from finding a home in the post-independence Congress. In seeking to restrict the Hindu communalists to the margins of Indian politics, Nehru and his supporters were simultaneously able to draw support from and invoke the threat of a vibrant left-wing outside the Congress. Second, the visceral anti-Congress views of the majority of Hindu Mahasabhites constituted a formidable obstacle to Patel's plans for a political realignment.

That the Congress ultimately did resist the Mahasabha's demands for independent India to be transformed into a Hindu Raj undoubtedly had a significant beneficial impact on the future of communal relations in India and its liberal-democratic political order. But in conceding this point, it must be stressed that the Congress did so only after abandoning its own longstanding opposition to the two-nation theory, insisting on the communal political partition of Bengal and the Punjab, and giving way to Hindu communalist pressure on other fronts, including the treatment of the Meos and the status of Urdu.

This thesis has shown that the communal radicalization of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League following the 1937 elections constitutes a telling parallel. Moreover, there are many other correlations in the League's and Mahasabha's subsequent development. Both opposed the 1942 Quit India movement, claiming it was directed against the community they purported to represent. In 1947 both were to be

found trying to rally princely opposition to the Congress and pledging support to various states' secession bids.

Like the Muslim League, the Mahasabha was led by a Western-educated elite that was orientated to the *Raj*'s representative institutions, not traditional religious leaders or a self-proclaimed elite of the religiously righteous. The only role religion played in Savarkar's *Hindutva* doctrine was as a means of determining who was to be part and who was to be excluded from the Indian/Hindusthani polity. Muslims and Christians were deemed outside the nation—because their religions are of non-Indian origin—while tribals and Depressed Classes were appropriated to the Hindu-fold.

Of course, there is a fundamental difference in the respective fates of the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha. The former succeeded in winning a mass base and realized a version of Pakistan. By any measure the Hindu Mahasabha was a failure as a party, winning only a handful of seats in three successive elections.

This thesis has repeatedly offered explanations and at various levels, from the immediate to the long-term, for the Mahasabha's repeated reversals and ultimate marginalization. The Mahasabha was not a cohesive force. While Savarkar pursued a strategy aimed at making the Mahasabha an all-India rival to the Congress, Mookerjee, whose principal concern was countering the Muslim communal-political elite in Bengal, sought an alliance with the Congress. The Mahasabha was a party of the privileged. Its war-time alliance with the British and pursuit of princely support only served to underline this. The Muslim-majority provinces aside, Hindu communalism had little popular appeal. It did not conform with the interests of India's toiling masses and ran contrary to a powerful impulse for socio-economic change.

The Congress, because of its long-association with opposition to the *Raj*, organizational strength and deep roots in the Hindu urban middle class—the social group from which the Mahasabha drew the bulk of its cadre—constituted a formidable obstacle to the Mahasabha, unlike anything that the Muslim League had to confront. Mahasabha leaders routinely complained that many in the Congress sympathized with the Hindu nationalist cause but dared not say so for fear of losing their posts. In the 1945-46 elections, the Congress was even able to undercut the Mahasabha by presenting itself as the best vehicle for realizing Hindu unity against the League and its Pakistan Demand.

But the Mahasabha's failure cannot be reduced to a question of the Congress occupying the political space to which it aspired. Although the two organizations advanced radically different conceptions of the Indian polity, there were significant ideological overlaps, especially in respect to their attitude toward the Depressed Classes. Nevertheless, in the final analysis the Hindu Mahasabha and the Congress drew their principal support and strength from different social forces.

The Second World War was a catalyst for dramatic change across Asia. By 1950, the Philippines and Indonesia had won their independence, the French position in Indochina was increasingly desperate, and China had undergone a civil war that had brought the Communist Party to power. India was not apart from this process. Five years after the Congress' triumph in the 1937 elections, India was shaken by the greatest rebellion against British rule since the 1857 mutiny. In the war's aftermath and the run-up to the granting of independence to the Dominions of India and Pakistan, British India was convulsed by strikes, peasant unrest, Untouchable challenges to forced labor, and demands for democratic reform in the princely states. The Indian National Army trials,

then the mutiny of Royal Indian Navy sailors, revealed that even in the British Indian military traditional authority was threatened.

The Congress had an ambivalent attitude to this social unrest. It feared disorder and sought to curb the popular struggles. At the same time, it staked its claim for power on its ability to harness the popular sentiment for change to a reform program that would serve the interests of its two most important constituencies: the dominant peasant castes, who rankled under *zamindar* privilege, and big business, which wanted a strong central government able to support native industry and control labor unrest.

If the Congress came to embody the ambitions of India's rising dominant classes, the Mahasabha was tied to the princes and landlords whose privileged position had been sustained by the *Raj* in exchange for their political support. Indeed, the dominant wing of the Mahasabha sided with the most die-hard elements in the old orders, thus positioning itself in direct opposition to the popular thrust for political and socio-economic change. In January 1948 and again in 1950 the Mahasabha emerged in semi-rebellion against the Congress government. Only because of severe state repression and their own political weakness were the Mahasabhites reconciled to the new political order.

The Mahasabha, as we have seen, did have some business support, including in Cawnpore, Bombay and Calcutta. If G.D. Birla and Walchand Hirachand were strong supporters of the Congress, their brothers, J.K. Birla and Gubalchand Hirachand, were long-associated with the Mahasabha. But this support collapsed with the 1945-46 elections. The Mahasabha's re-emergence in a more radical guise in late 1946-47 only reinforced the growing business consensus that the Mahasabha was too politically unstable, communally incendiary, and socially isolated—having no support to speak of

in the countryside and little beyond the most privileged sections of society—to serve as an effective political instrument.

In February 2003, over the protest of the opposition parties, V.D. Savarkar's portrait was hung in India's parliament. The Bharatiya Janata Party, the dominant force in India's current coalition government, reveres Savarkar as a nationalist hero, claiming that his youthful anti-British terrorist activities and later propagation of his Hindu supremacist *Hindutva* doctrine were all directed to the same admirable end. While primarily of symbolic significance, the hanging of Savarkar's portrait can only send a chilling message to India's Muslim minority and underscores that the struggle to define India's polity continues. Illuminating the Mahasabha's role in the convulsive birth and formative years of independent India is thus both of historical and contemporary political significance.

Appendix I: List of Abbreviations and a Note on Spelling

AICC	All-India Congress Committee
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
CID	Criminal Investigation Division
CNP	Congress Nationalist Party
CPI	Communist Party of India
CUP	Cambridge University Press
CWC	Congress Working Committee
<i>CWG</i>	<i>The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi</i>
GOI	Government of India
HMS Papers	Hindu Mahasabha Papers
INA	Indian National Army
INC	Indian National Congress
IOL	India Office Library
<i>JAS</i>	<i>Journal of Asian Studies</i>
KPP	Krishak Praja Party
<i>MAS</i>	<i>Modern Asian Studies</i>
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
NAI	National Archives of India
NAP	National Agricultural Party (there were two, one for Agra, the other for Oudh)
NDC	National Defence Committee
NMML	Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
NPP	(Punjab) National Progressive Party

NWFP	North-West Frontier Province
OUP	Oxford University Press
RIN	Royal Indian Navy
RRP	Ram Rajya Parishad
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SPM Papers	Shyma Prasad Mookerjee Papers
<i>SWJN</i>	<i>Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru</i>
<i>TOP</i>	<i>Transfer of Power Documents</i>
U. of	University of
U. of T.	University of Toronto
UP	United Provinces/Uttar Pradesh

A Note on Spelling:

This thesis has used the English version of Indian place names current in the middle of the last century. Hence, Pune is rendered as Poona, Kanpur as Cawnpore, Mumbai as Bombay, and so forth.

Appendix II: Glossary

<i>ahimsa</i>	non-violence
<i>Akhand Hindusthan</i>	united or undivided India
<i>Akhil Bharat</i>	all-India
<i>akhara</i>	physical culture club
<i>ashram</i>	retreat or spiritual community
<i>azad</i>	free
<i>begar</i>	forced, unpaid labor
<i>bhadralok</i>	“the respectable folk” of Bengal
<i>Bande Mataram</i>	song composed by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and promoted by the Congress as a nationalist anthem
<i>bania</i>	Hindu shopkeeper, trader or moneylender
<i>dal</i>	group, party
<i>Dalit</i>	Untouchable
<i>danda</i>	rod
<i>dewan</i>	chief minister in a princely state
<i>dharma</i>	moral and religious duty
<i>darbar</i>	court of princely state
<i>goonda</i>	hoodlum, hired thug
<i>harijan</i>	term coined by M.K. Gandhi for the Untouchables, literally Child of God
<i>hartal</i>	strike or cessation of business as a form of protest
Hindu <i>sangathan</i>	movement for Hindu unity; promoted concept of a Hindu society that transcended divisions of caste and sect

<i>Hindutva</i>	Name given by Savarkar to his Hindu nationalist definition of the Indian polity
<i>izzat</i>	honor, prestige
<i>jagirdar</i>	large landlord; holder of a jagir (grant of land in return for service)
<i>jati</i>	local caste group
<i>jotedar</i>	tenure-holder; in late colonial Bengal most privileged layer of peasantry
<i>Khilafat</i>	temporal and spiritual head of all (Sunni) Muslims; movement among Muslims in India during and immediately following World War One in support of the then <i>Khalifah</i> , the Sultan of Turkey
<i>kisan</i>	peasant
<i>kisan sabhas</i>	peasant organizations
<i>krishak</i>	peasant
<i>Kshatriya</i>	warrior; <i>varna</i> or caste of warriors
<i>lac or lakh</i>	hundred thousand
<i>lathi</i>	bamboo stave
<i>Lok Sabha</i>	lower house of Indian parliament
<i>mahant</i>	chief of a monastery or other Hindu religious institution
<i>mahasabha</i>	literally, "Great Society"
<i>mandal</i>	committee, board
<i>mazdoor</i>	worker
<i>mela</i>	a fair
<i>mofussil</i>	countryside, hinterland
<i>pandal</i>	marquee

<i>panth</i>	system of religious belief and practice
<i>pir</i>	Muslim spiritual leader
<i>pith</i>	monastery
<i>praja</i>	tenant
<i>Rai Bahadur</i>	honorific
<i>Raj</i>	rule; commonly used in reference to British rule and as synonym for colonial state and administration
<i>rashtra</i>	nation or state
<i>sabha</i>	association
<i>sadhu</i>	Hindu holy man
<i>sanatan</i>	literally eternal, used to denote orthodox Hindu religious observance
<i>sanatanists</i>	orthodox, as opposed to reform, Hindus
<i>sangathan</i>	unity, strength, organization
<i>sangathanist</i>	advocate of Hindu <i>sangathan</i>
<i>sangchalak</i>	a prominent person who acts as a patron of the RSS
<i>sanyasi</i>	itinerant Hindu holy man
<i>sarsangchalak</i>	chief of the RSS
<i>satyagraha</i>	“way of truth”; name given by Gandhi to his strategy of non-violent civil disobedience
<i>seth</i>	Hindu banker or moneylender
<i>shuddhi</i>	purification; movement to win converts to Hinduism and bring religious practices of some lower caste groups more in line with Hinduism as practiced by the “twice-born” castes
<i>swaraj</i>	self-rule

<i>swadeshi</i>	of own country; term used by nationalist movement in promoting notion that Indians should buy Indian-made goods
<i>tabligh</i>	conversion (to Islam)
<i>taluqdar</i>	titled, large landowner in Oudh region of UP
<i>tanzim</i>	(Islamic) organization
<i>ulema</i>	Muslim clergy
<i>varna</i>	caste; usually used in reference to four-fold division of society described in classical Brahmanical scripture
<i>Veer</i>	honorific denoting brave, strong, heroic
<i>zamindar</i>	landlord
<i>zamindari</i>	British-created system of land tenure that prevailed in most of north India and in which the <i>zamindars</i> were responsible for collecting land-tax.

Bibliography

The bibliography is arranged under the following main headings:

I. Primary Sources

- A. Personal Papers
- B. Interviews & Oral Interview Transcripts
- C. Party Documents and Publications
- D. Government Documents and Publications
- E. Published Collections of Documents
- F. Newspapers and Periodicals
- G. Other Works

II. Secondary Sources

- A. Books and Unpublished Dissertations
- B. Articles and Articles in Books

If needed, consult the list of abbreviations in Appendix 1, beginning on page 426.

I. Primary Sources

A. Personal Papers

M.R. Jayakar. National Archives of India, Delhi (Hereafter NAI).
_____. Microfilm, Robarts Library, University of Toronto.

N.B. Khare. NAI.

Ashutosh Lahiry. J. Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi. (Hereafter NMML).

Madan Mohan Malaviya. Microfilm, NMML.

Shyma Prasad Mookerjee. NMML

B.S. Moonje. NMML.

Pandit Nanak Chand. NMML.

Ganpat Rai. NMML.

V.D. Savarkar. Microfilm, NMML.

B. Interviews & Oral Interview Transcripts

Oral Interview Transcript N.B. Khare. (NMML)

Oral Interview Transcript Gokal Chand Narang. (NMML)

Oral Interview Transcript Ganpat Rai. (NMML)

Mahendra Pratap, editor *Hindu Sabha Varta*, conducted in New Delhi by author April 1998.

Dinesh Chadra Tyagi, President All India Hindu Mahasabha, conducted in New Delhi by author April 1998.

C. Party Documents and Publications

DOCUMENTS

All-India Congress Committee Papers. NMML.

All-India Hindu Mahasabha Papers. Both "C" or all-India series and "P" or Provincial Series, NMML.

PUBLICATIONS

All-India Hindu Mahasabha or Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha

The History of the Bhaglapur Struggle: 23rd, 1942, Session of the Hindu Mahasabha.

_____. *Full proceedings of 1949 Hindu Mahasabha Session.*

_____. *Hindu Mahasabaha Tracts, 1941-54.* University of Toronto.

_____. *Constitution, Aims, Objects and Rules.* New Delhi: Hindu Mahasabha, 1951.

_____. *Election Manifesto of the Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha as Adopted by the Working Commmittee in its Meeting Held in August 1951 in New Delhi.* New Delhi: Office Secretary Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha, 1951.

_____. *Election Manifesto: 1957.* New Delhi: Hardyal Devgun, Office Secretary Akhil Bharat Hindu Maha Sabha, 1957.

Mahasabha's New Stand. New Delhi: Ashutosh Lahiry, General Secretary

All India Hindu Mahasabha, 1949

_____. *Relief Activities*. Undated.

_____. *Twenty-Eighth Session of the Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha. Calcutta, December 24-26, 1949. Full Proceedings*. Calcutta: Ashutosh Lahiry, General Secretary, Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha, 1950.

Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha Central Parliamentary Board.
Mahasabha and its Ideals. Calcutta: Bharat Publications, 1950.

Bharatiya Jana Sangh. *Bharatiya Jana Sangh: Party Documents*. 5 vols.
New Delhi: Bharatiya Jana Sangh, 1973.

Communist Party of India, ed. *Correspondence Between Mahatma Gandhi and P.C. Joshi*. Second Edition. Bombay: People's Publishing House, 1945.

A History of the Hindu-Muslim Problem in India. From the Earliest Contacts up to its Present Phase with Suggestions for its Solution. Being the Report of the Committee Appointed by the Indian National Congress to Enquire into the Cawnpore Riots of March 1931. Reprinted in *Roots of Communal Politics*. Ed. N. Gerald Barrier. New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1976.

Political & Economic Information Department of the All-India Congress Committee, "A Brief Analysis of the Election Results," reproduced in *IAR*, 1937: II, 168 (A)- 168 (P).

Report of the Inquiry Committee Appointed by the Council of All-India Muslim League to Inquire into the Grievances in Congress Provinces. Place of publication unknown: Liaquat Ali Khan, Honorary Secretary, All India Muslim League, 1938-39..

D. Government Documents and Publications

Election Commission, India. *Report on the First General Elections in India, 1951-52. Vol. I (General)*. Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1955.

Election Commission, India. *Report on the First General Elections in India, 1951-52. Vol. II (Statistical)*. Delhi: Manager of Publications 1955.

Government of India. Public and Judicial Proceedings L/P and J.
India Office Library. (Hereafter IOL)

Home Political Proceedings. IOL and NAI

Census of India.

Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the conspiracy to murder Mahatma Gandhi. (by J.I. Kapur, hence Kapur Commission) 2 vols. Delhi: Government of India, 1969.

Statistical Abstract for British India with Statistics, when Available, Relating to Certain Indian States, 1927-28 to 1936-37. Department of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics. Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1943.

Statistical Abstract for British India with Statistics, when Available, Relating to Certain Indian States, 1936-37 to 1940-41. Delhi: Government of Indian Press, 1943.

E. Published Collections of Documents

[Organized by title of collection, editors underneath]

Writings and Speeches, Babasaheb Ambedkar. Vols. 1-12.

Ed. Vasant Moon. Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1982-1994.

Bengal Politics: Documents of the Raj 1940-43. Vols. 1-3.

Eds. Enayetur Rahim and Joyce L. Rahim. Dhaka: University Press, 1997-2000.

The Encyclopaedia of the Indian National Congress. Vol. 13.

Eds. A.M. Zaidi and S.G. Zaidi. New Delhi: S. Chand, 1981.

Foundations of Pakistan: All-India Muslim League Documents 1906-47, Vols. 1-2.

Ed. S. Pirzada. Karachi: 1970.

The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi.

New Delhi: The Publications Division. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Government of India, 1958-1983.

Indian Muslims. A Documentary Record (1900-1947). Vols. 1-12.

Ed. Shan Muhammad. Meerut: Meenaksh Prakashan, 1980-1994.

Quaid-I-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah Papers, First Series, Vols. 1-5.

Ed. Z.H. Zaidi. Islamabad: National Archives of Pakistan, 1993-99.

Letters to Chief Ministers 1947-64, Jawaharlal Nehru.

Ed. G. Parthasarath. Delhi: OUP, 1985.

Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru. 1972 Series.

Ed. S. Gopal. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1974. Vols. 1-15.

Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru. Second Series. Vols. 1-22.

Ed. S. Gopal. New Delhi: OUP, 1984-

Selected Works of Govind Ballabh Pant. Vols. 1-12.

Ed. B.R. Nanda. Delhi: OUP, 1993 on.

Paradoxes of Partition, 1937-1947, Vol. 1.

Ed. S.A.I. Tirmizi. New Delhi : Centre for Federal Studies, Hamdard University, 1998.

Partition of the Punjab, 1947: A Compilation of Official Documents.

Ed. Mian Muhammad Sadullah. Vol. 1. Lahore: National Documentation Centre, 1983.

Sardar Patel's Correspondence: 1940-50, Vols. 1-10..

Ed. Durga Das. Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1971-74.

Sardar [Patel's] Letters Mostly Unknown, Vols. 1-2.

Ed. G.M. Nandurkar. Ahmedabad: Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Smarak Bhavan, 1977.

Pilgrimage to Freedom, Vol. 1.

Ed. K.M. Munshi.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad Correspondence and Select Documents. Vols. 5-10.

Ed. Valmiki Choudhary. New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1986

Quit India Movement: British Secret Documents.

Ed. P.N. Chopra. New Delhi: Interprint, 1976.

Select Documents: India 1947-50. Vol. 1.

Ed. S.L. Poplai. London: OUP, 1959.

Select Documents on Partition of Punjab—1947: India and Paksitan.

Ed. Kirpal Singh Delhi: National Book Shop, 1991.

Towards Freedom 1937-47: Volume I—Experiment with Provincial Autonomy, 1 January-31 December 1937.

Ed. P.N. Chopra. New Delhi: Indian Council for Historical Research, 1985.

Towards Freedom: Documents on the Movement for Independence in India 1938. Parts 1-3.

Ed. Basudev Chatterji. New Delhi: Indian Council for Historical Research, 1999.

Towards Freedom: Documents on the Movement for Independence in India 1943-44. Parts 1-3.

Ed. Partha Sarathi Gupta. Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research, 1997.

The Transfer of Power 1942-7. Constitutional Relations between Britain and India. 12 vols.

Editor in Chief Nicholas Mansergh. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1971-1983.

F. Newspapers and Periodicals

NEWSPAPERS

Hindu Outlook (Delhi)
Hitavada (Nagpur)
Leader (Allahabad)
Mahratta (Poona)
Times of India (Bombay)

PERIODICALS

Hindustan Review
Indian Annual Register. An Annual Digest of Public Affairs of India. [IAR]
Indian Year Book. A Statistical and Historical Annual of the Indian Empire, with an Explanation of the Principal Topics of the Day. Ed. Francis Low. Bombay: Bennett, Coleman & Co.
Modern Review (Calcutta).

G. Other Works

Aney, M.S. *Hyderabad Administration: A Critical Survey.* Delhi: Sarvadeshik Arya Pritinidhi Sabha, 1939.

_____. *Anti-Pakistan Conference, Lahore. 1st and 2nd December, 1940. Presidential Address.* Poona: Kesari Press.

Banerjee, Nitya Narayan *Hindu Outlook.* Calcutta: Hindutva Publications, 1990.

Banerji, Nripendra Chaivdra *At the Crossroads, 1885-1946: An Autobiography.* Calcutta: A. Mukherjee, 1950.

Bhide, Anant Sadashiv (Guruji) *From Quit India to Split India.* Poona: Manohar Mahadeo Kelkar, 1945.

Birla, G.D. *In the Shadow of the Mahatma. A Personal Memoir.* Bombay: Orient Longmans, 1953.

_____. *Bapu a Unique Association.* Vol. 1. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1977.

- Bose, Sarat Chandra *I Warned My Countrymen: Being the Collected Works 1945-50 of Sarat Chandra Bose*. Ed. Sisir K. Bose. Calcutta: Netaji Research Bureau, 1968.
- Bose, Subas Chandra *The Indian Struggle 1920-1942*. Calcutta: Asia Publishing House, 1964.
- Bose, Subhas Chandra *Netaji: Collected Works Vol. 10*, Ed. Sisir Kumar Bose and Sugata Bose. Calcutta: Netaji Research Bureau, 1998.
- Chand, Lal. *Self-Abnegation in Politics. With a Foreword by Bhai Parmanand*. Lahore: The Central Hindu Yuvak Sabha, 1938.
- Chatterjee, B.C. *Whither Bengal: Being a Study in National Awakening and Decline*. Calcutta: Basumati, 1928.
- Chatterjee, Lalit Mohan and S.P. Mookerjee *Representative Indians*. Calcutta: The Popular Agency, 1936.
- Chatterjee, N.C. *All-India Hindu Students Conference, 1943*.
- _____. *Hindu Politics: The Message of the Mahasabha. Speeches and Addresses*. Calcutta: 1944.
- _____. *Awakening of New India: Problems of Today*. New Delhi: Ram Tirtha Bhatia, c. 1952.
- Chatterjee, N.C. *North-Bengal Hindu Conference. Presidential Address. Delivered by Sj. N.C. Chatterjee, Working President of the Bengal Hindu Mahasabha*. Calcutta: Bhowanipore Press, 1942.
- _____. *Hindu Conference. Naihati. 21st November, 1943. Presidential Address of Sj. N.C. Chatterjee*. Calcutta: Bhowanipore Press, 1943.
- _____. *All-India Hindu Students' Conference. Second Session. Presidential Address*. Calcutta: Sj. Monoranjan Chaudhury, Secy., Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha, 1943.
- _____. *Barisal Hindu Conference Presidential Address by N.C. Chatterjee. The 9 September 1944*. Calcutta: Monoranjan Chaudhury, Secy., Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha.
- _____. *Moorsheedabad District Hindu Conference. Presidential Address by N.C. Chatterjee. The 27 November 1944*. Calcutta: Kshetra Mohan Roy.

_____. *Hindu Politics: The Message of the Mahasabha.*

_____. *Collection of Speeches & Addresses by Sj. N.C. Chatterjee, Working President, Bengal Provincial Hindu Mahasabha, and Vice-President, All-India Hindu Mahasabha.* Calcutta: Ramesh Chandra Banerjee, 1944.

_____. *Bengal Provincial Hindu Conference. Presidential Address by Sj. N.C. Chatterjee.* Calcutta: B.C. Lahiri.

_____. *The Hooghly Sardar Subdivisional Conference 11th January 1948. Presidential Address by Sj. N.C. Chatterjee.* Calcutta: S.C. Roy.

_____. *Bankura District Conference Presidential address By Sri N.C. Chatterjee. Bankura 16th June 1951.*

_____. *Presidential Address By Shri N.C. Chatterjee, M.P., President All-India Hindu Mahasabha, 30th Session Bhopal (28 December, 1952).* New Delhi: General Secretary All-India Hindu Mahasabha.

_____. *Presidential Address By Shri N.C. Chatterjee, M.P., President All-India Hindu Mahasabha 31st session, Hyderabad, (7th May, 1954).* New Delhi: General Secretary All-India Hindu Mahasabha.

Dar, Bashir Ahmad. *Why Pakistan.* 2nd ed. rev. (1st, 1946). Lahore: Islamic Book Service, 1978.

Date, S.R. *Bhaganagar Struggle: A Brief History of the Movement Led by the Hindu Mahasabha in Hyderabad State in 1938-39.* Pune: S.R. Date, c. 1939.

Deshpande, Vishnu Ghanashyam *Why Hindu Rashtra?* Delhi: Hindu Mahasabha, 1949.

_____. *Inaugural Address of the 46th session of the Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha, Gwalior (23rd April 1961).* Delhi: Navchetan Press.

Dixit, N.G. et al., eds. *Dharmaveer Dr. B. S. Moonje Commemoration Volume. Birth Centenary Celebration 1872-1972.* Nagpur: Centenary Celebration Committee, 1972.

Gandhi, M.K. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi.* New Delhi: The Publications Division. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Government of India, 1958-1983

Gandhi-Muslim Conspiracy. "By a Hindu Nationalist." Poona: R.D. Ghanekar, 1941.

Godse, Gopal. *Gandhiji's Murder and After.* Trans. S.T. Godbole. Delhi: Surya-Prakashan, 1989.

- Godse, Nathuram. *May it Please Your Honour*. Delhi: Surya-Prakashan, 1989.
- Golwalkar, M.S. *We, or Our Nationhood Defined*. Nagpur: Bharat Prakashan, 1939.
- _____. *Bunch of Thoughts*. Bangalore: Jagarna Prakashan, 1966.
- Gupta, Chitra *Life of Barrister Savarkar, Revised and Brought up t date by Indra Prakash*. New Delhi: Hindu Mission Pustak Bhandar, 1939.
- Hardas, Balshastri *What I saw in Bihar*. Nagpur: Rashtradharma Prasak Granthamala, [c. 1947]
- Hodson, H.V. *The Great Divide: Britain-India-Pakistan*. London, Hutchinson, 1969.
- Jayakar, M.R. *The Story of My Life*. Vols. 1-2. New York: Asia Publishing House, 1958-1959.
- Ketkar, Shridhar Venkatesh *Victorious India*. Poona: [n.p.] 1937.
- _____. "The All India Hindu Maha Sabha: Its Aims and Present Policy," *IAR*, I, 1941: 276-281.
- Khaliquzzaman, Choudhry *Pathway to Pakistan*, Lahore: Longman's Pakistan, 1961.
- Khare, N.B. *Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha Special Session, Jaipur, 28th April, 1951. Presidential Address*. Jaipur: Secretary, Reception Committee Hindu Mahasabha Special Session, Jaipur.
- _____. *My Political Memoirs or Autobiography*. Nagpur: J.R. Joshi, 1959.
- Lahiry, Ashutosh. *Gandhi in Indian Politics: A Critical Review*. Calcutta: Firma KLM Private, 1976.
- Lajpat Rai, Lala *The Arya Samaj. An Account of its Origin, Doctrine, and Activities, with a Biographical Sketch of the Founder*. Lahore: Uttar Chand Kapur, 1932.
- _____. *Lala Lajpat Rai Writings and Speeches*. Vols. 1-2. Ed. Vijaya Chandra Joshi. Delhi: University Publishers, 1966.
- Malaviya, Madan Mohan. *Speeches and Writings*. Madras: G. Natesan, 1919.
- _____. *Life and Speeches*. Madras: S. Ganesh, c. 1928.
- _____. "Hindu-Muslim Unity." *Indian Review*, 24, 1928.

- Madan Mohan Malaviya and M.S. Aney, *The Congress Nationalist Party: What It Stands For. Why Every Indian Should Support It* (publisher and place of publication unknown, 1934);
- Maniam, E.V.S. *Landmarks in the life of Sir J.P. Srivastava* Bombay: Pratt, undated (c. 1945: after May, 1945.)
- Mehta, Asoka and Achyut Patwardhan. *The Communal Triangle in India*. 2nd ed. rev. Allahabad: Kitabistan, 1942.
- Mehta, Jamnadas. Foreword. *Gandhi-Muslim Conspiracy*. By a Hindu Nationalist. Poona: R.D. Ghanekar, 1941.
- _____. Foreword. *Philosophy and Action of the R..S.S. for the Hind Swaraj*. By Anthony Elenjimmittam. Bombay, Laxmi Publications, 1951.
- Mookerjee, Syama Prasad. *Leaves From a Diary*. Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- _____. *Address at the Annual Convocation*. Patna: University of Patna, 1937.
- _____. *A phase of the Indian Struggle*. Nadia: M.N. Bhowmik, 1942.
- _____. *Awake Hindustan*. Calcutta: Romesh Chandra Banerjee. 1944.
- _____. Foreword. *Real Hinduism*. By Gokul Chand Narang. Lahore: New Book Society, 1947.
- Moonje, B.S. *Hindu National Ideals and Ways to Achieve Them*. Poona: The Mahratta, 1943.
- Mukerji, U.N. *Hinduism and the Coming Census*. Calcutta: Srikali Ghosh, 1911.
- Munshi, K.M. *Jaya Somanath*. Trans. H.M. Patel. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1976.
- Narang, Gokul Chand. *Transformation of Sikhism into a Political Organization*. Lahore: The Tribune Press, c. 1910.
- _____. *The Plight of Punjab Minorities under the So-Called Unionist Government. A Speech Delivered during the General Discussion on the Budget of 1941-42 in the Punjab Legislative Assembly, with Notes by Ram Lal Tara, Secretary, the Punjab Vigilance Society*. 2nd ed. rev. Lahore: Punjab Vigilance Society, 1942.
- _____. "What is Wrong with the Hindus?" *Indian Review*, August 1945: 433-38.
- _____. *Real Hinduism*. Lahore: New Book Society, 1947.

Nath, Narendra *Memorandum on the Rights Claimed by Hindu Minority in North-West India*.
Lahore: Civil & Military Gazette Press, 1928.

_____. "The Minority Question in India." *Indian Affairs*
(London), October 1931: 12-17.

_____. "The Hindu Minority." *Asiatic Review* (London),
January 1932: 92-102.

*A National Government. Proceedings of the Non-Party Political Conference Held in Bombay on
13th and 14th March 1941*. N.p.: n.p., 1941.

Nehru, Jawaharlal "Orthodox of all Religions Unite." *Modern Review*, Dec. 1935: 625-631.

_____. *A Bunch of Old Letters*. New York: Asia Publishing, House, 1958,

Nehru, Motilal. *Selected Works of Motilal Nehru*. Vols. 1-5. Eds. Ravinder Kumar and H.D.
Sharma. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1982-1993.

The Nehru Report. Report of the Committee Appointed by the All Parties' Conference, 1928.
Reprinted in *The Nehru Report an Anti-Separatist Manifesto*, ed. N. Gerald Barrier. New
Delhi: Michiko & Panjathan, 1975.

Parmanand, Bhai "Hindu and Hinduism." *Modern Review*, June 1912: 628-32.

_____. *Hindu National Movement*. Lahore: Central Hindu Yuvak Sabha, 1929.

_____. *The Story of My Life*. 2nd ed. New Delhi: S. Chand and Co., 1982. (Reprint of
1937 ed. Trans. N. Sundar Iyer. Lahore: Central Hindu Yuvak Sabha, 1937.)

_____. *Hindu Sangathan*. Translated by Lal Chand Dhawaran.
Lahore: 1936.

Prakash, Indra. *A Review of the History & Work of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Hindu
Sanghatan Movement*. New Delhi: The Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha, December 1938.

_____. *Where do we Differ? The Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha*. New Delhi: Hindu
Mission Pustak Bhandar, 1942.

_____. *A Review of the History & Work of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Hindu
Sanghatan Movement*. 1952 ed. New Delhi: The Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha,
New Delhi, 1952.

Prasad, Rajendra. *India Divided*. Bombay: Hind Kitabs, 1946.

_____. *At the Feet of Mahatma Gandhi*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1955.

Rajkumar, N.V. *Indian Political Parties*. New Delhi: All-India Congress Committee, 1948.

Ram, Madho. "The Work of the Punjab Hindu Sabha." *Hindustan Review* (Calcutta), May-June, 1912: 420-25.

Salam, Abus. *The How, Why and Wherefore of the Hyderabad Struggle*. Bombay: Published by the author, 1941.

Sarhadi, Ajit Singh. *Punjabi Subha: The Story of the Struggle*. Delhi: U.C. Kapur & Sons, 1970.

Savarkar, V.D. *Hindu Sangathan. Its Ideology and Immediate Programme*. Bombay: Hindu Maha Sabha Presidential Office, 1940.

_____. *Veer Savarkar's "Whirl-Wind Propaganda" (Statements, Messages & Extracts from the President's Diary of his Propagandistic Tours & Interviews, from Dec. 1937 to Oct. 1941)*. Ed. A.S. Bhide. Bombay: A.S. Bhide, 1941.

_____. *Hindu-Pad-Padashi--A Review of the Hindu Empire of Maharashtra*. Poona: Manohar Granth Mala, 1942.

_____. *Hindu Rashtravad: Being an Exposition of the Ideology and Immediate Programme of Hindu Rashtra as Outlined by Swatantraya Veer V.D. Savarkar*. Ed. S. Parkash. Rohtak: S. Parkash, 1945.

_____. *The Indian War of Independence, 1857*. 1970 ed. New Delhi: Rajdhani Granthagar, 1970.

_____. *Samagra Savarkar Wangmaya. Writings of Veer Sarakar.. Vol. 6*. Poona: Maharashtra Prantik Hindusabha, 1964.

_____. *The Story of My Transportation for Life*. Bombay: Sadbhakti Publications, 1950.

_____. *Hindu Rashtra Darshan*. Bombay: veer Savarkar Prakashan, 1992.

_____. *A Warning to the Hindus*. N.p: n.p., n.d.

Sen, N.B., ed. *Punjab's Eminent Hindus: Being Biographical Sketches of Twenty Hindu Ministers, Judges, Politicians, Educationists and Legislators of the Punjab by some Well-Known Writers of this Province*. Lahore: New Book Society, 1943.

Shankar, Pandit Shyam "Political Views of Orthodox Hindus." *Asiatic Review* (London),

January 1928: 85-114.

Shraddhanand, Swami. *Hindu Sangathan. Saviour of the Dying Race*. Delhi: 1926.

_____. *Inside Congress*. Bombay: Phoenix, 1946.

_____. *Swami Shradhananda*. Ed. M.R. Jambunathan. Bombay: Vidya Bhavan, 1961.

Singh Sarhadi, Ajit. *Punjabi Subha: The Story of the Struggle*. Delhi: U.C. Kapur & Sons, 1970.

Sircar, Nripendra Nath. *Sir N.N. Sircar's Speeches and Pamphlets. A Collection of the Pamphlets Circulated by Sir N.N. Sircar in 1933 among members of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform and among Members of Parliament, Report of his Cross-Examination of Sir Samuel Hoare and Others before the Joint Committee, and his Speeches before Meetings of Conservatives in London*. Ed. B.N. Dutta Roy. Calcutta: The Book Co., 1934

_____. *Calcutta Town Hall Meeting of the Hindu Citizens to Protest against the Attacks upon the Hindus of Bengal by Mr. Fazlul Huq, Chief Minister of Bengal. Speech by Sir Nripendra Nath Sircar, K.C.S.I., Chairman of the Meeting. 6 March, 1941*. Calcutta: N.C. Chatterjee.

Sreenivasan, M.A. *Of the Raj, Maharajas and Me*. New Delhi: Ravi Dayal, 1991.

Subba Rao or Subbarao, G.V. *The Partition of India (1947)*. Amalapuram, Andhra Pradesh: Goshthi Book Trust, 1958.

_____. "Dr. Moonje--A Mighty Politician." In *Dharmaveer Dr. B. S. Moonje Commemoration Volume. Birth Centenary Celebration 1872-1972*. Eds. N.G. Dixit et al. Nagpur: Centenary Celebration Committee.

Tuker, Francis. *While Memory Serves*. London: Cassell, 1950.

Wavell, Lord. *The Viceroy's Journal*. Ed. Penderel Moon. London: Oxford University Press, 1973.

Zaidi, Syed Azhar Husain. *The New Nazis*. Karachi: Ferozsons, undated.

Secondary Sources

Books & Unpublished Dissertations

- Andersen, Walter K. and S.D. Damle. *The Brotherhood in Saffron: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism*. Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1987.
- Arnold, David. *The Congress in Tamilnad : nationalist politics in South India, 1919-1937*. New Delhi : Manohar, 1977.
- Aziz, K.K. *History of Partition of India. Origin and Development of the Idea of Pakistan*. Vols. 1-4. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 1988.
- Bahadur, Lal. *Struggle for Pakistan. Tragedy of the Triumph of Muslim Communalism in India*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1988.
- Baker, D.E.U. *Changing Political Leadership in an Indian Province: The Central Provinces and Berar 1919-1939*. Delhi: OUP, 1979.
- Basu, T. and P. Datta, S. Sarkar, T. Sarkar and S. Sen. *Khaki Shorts, Saffron Flags: a Critique of the Hindu Right*. New Delhi : Orient Longman, 1993.
- Baxter, Craig. *District Voting Trends in India: A Research Tool*. New York: South Asian Institute, School of International Affairs, Columbia University, 1969.
- . *The Jana Sangh: A Biography of an Indian Political Party*. Bombay: OUP, 1971.
- Bayly, Susan. *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age. The New Cambridge History of India IV, 3*. Cambridge : CUP, 1999.
- Bhatt, Chetan. *Hindu Nationalism: Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths*. Oxford: Berg, 2001.
- Bose, Sugata. *Agrarian Bengal: Economy, Social Structure and Politics, 1919-1947*. Cambridge: CUP, 1986.
- Brass, Paul. *Factional Politics in an Indian State: The Congress in Uttar Pradesh*. Berkeley: U. of California, 1965.

- _____. *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*. London: CUP, 1974.
- Broomfield, J.H. *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Twentieth-Century Bengal*. Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1968.
- Brown, Judith. *Gandhi's Rise to Power: Indian politics 1915-1922*. Cambridge South Asian Studies. London: CUP, 1972.
- Cashman, R.I. *The Myth of the Lokamanya. Tilak and Mass Politics in Maharashtra*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975.
- Casolari, Marzia. *The Italian Connection, Hindutva's Foreign Tie-Up in the 1930s: Archival Evidence*. New Delhi: Footnotes, 2000.
- Chakrabarty, Bidyut. *Local Politics and Indian Nationalism: Midnapur 1919-1944*. New Delhi: Manohar, 1997.
- _____. *Subhas Chandra Bose and Middle Class Radicalism. A Study in Indian Nationalism*. London: The London School of Economics and Political Science, 1990.
- Chakravarty, Papia. *Hindu Reponse to Nationalist Ferment: Bengal 1909-1935*. Calcutta: Subarnarekha, 1992.
- Chandra, Bipan. *Communalism in Modern India*. 2nd ed. rev. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1987.
- Chandra, Bipan, M. Mukherjee, et al. *India's Struggle for Independence 1857-1947*. New Delhi: Viking, 1988.
- Chatterjee, Partha. *The Present History of West Bengal: Essays in Political Criticism*. Delhi: OUP, 1998.
- Chatterji, Joya. *Bengal Divided, Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947*. Cambridge: CUP, 1995.
- Cheesman, David. *Landlord Power and Rural Indebtedness in Colonial Sind, 1865-1901*. London: Curzon, 1997.
- Choudhury, G.W. *Pakistan's Relations with India, 1947-1966*. London: Pall Mall Press, 1968.
- Copland, Ian. *The Princes of India in the Endgame of Empire*. Cambridge: CUP, 1997.

- Curran, J.A., Jr. *Militant Hinduism in Indian Politics: A Study of the R.S.S.* New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1951.
- Damodaran, Vinita. *Broken Promises: Popular Protest, Indian Nationalism and the Congress Party in Bihar, 1935-1946.* Delhi: OUP, 1992.
- Das Gupta, Jyotirindra. *Language Conflict and National Development: Group Politics and National Language Policy in India.* Berkeley: University of California, 1970.
- Das, Suranjan. *Communal Riots in Bengal, 1905-47.* Delhi: OUP, 1992.
- _____, and Sekhar Bandopadhyay. *Caste and Communal Politics in South Asia.* Department of History, University of Calcutta, Monograph 8. Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi, 1993.
- Dixit, Prabha. *Communalism--a Struggle for Power.* New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1974.
- Engineer, Ashgar Ali. *Communalism and Communal Violence in India: An Analytical Approach to Hindu-Muslim Conflict.* Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1989.
- _____. *Communalism in India: A Historical and Empirical Study.* New Delhi: Vikas, 1996.
- Erdman, Howard L. *The Swatantra Party and Indian Conservatism.* Cambridge South Asian Studies. Cambridge: CUP, 1967.
- Freitag, Sandria B. *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.
- Gauba, K.L. *The Assassination of Mahatma Gandhi.* Bombay: Jaico, 1969.
- Gautam, Meena. *Communalism and Indian politics, 1928-35.* Delhi: Pragati Publications, 1993.
- Ghosh, Suniti Kumar. *The Indian Big Bourgeoisie: Its Genesis, Growth and Character.* Calcutta: Suniti Jumar Ghosh, 1985.
- _____. Suniti Kumar Ghosh, *India and the Raj 1919-1947*, Vol. 2. Bombay: Research Unit for Political Economy.

- Gopal, Sarvepalli. *Radhakrishnan: A Biography*. London: Unwin, 1989.
- Gordon, Leonard A. *Bengal: The National Movement, 1876-1940*. New York: Columbia University, 1974.
- . *Brothers against the Raj. A Biography of Indian Nationalists Sarat and Subas Chandra Bose*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.
- Gowher, Rizi. *Linlithgow and India. A Study of British Policy and the Political Impasse in India, 1936-1943*. London: Royal Historical Society, 1978.
- Goyal, Des Raj. *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh*. New Delhi: Radha Krishna, 1979.
- Graham, Bruce. *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics: The Origins and Development of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh*. Cambridge: CUP, 1990.
- Grossman, Patricia A. *Bengal Politics: Violence and the Construction of Communal Identity Among Bengali Muslims, 1905-47*. Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1999.
- Guha, Amalendu. *Planter-Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam, 1826-1947*. New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research, 1977.
- Gupta, Amit Kumar. *North West Frontier Province Legislative and Freedom, 1932-47*. New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research, 1976.
- Gupta, S.L. *Pandit Madhan Mohan Malaviya: A Socio-Political Study*. Allahabad: Chugh Publications, 1978.
- Hardy, P. *The Muslims of British India*. Cambridge South Asian Studies. London: CUP, 1972.
- Hasan, Mushirul, ed. *India's Partition: Process, Strategy and Mobilization*. Themes in Indian History. Delhi: OUP, 1993.
- . *Legacy of a Divided Nation: India's Muslims since Independence*. Delhi: OUP, 1997.
- . *Nationalism and Communal Politics in India, 1885-1930*. New Delhi: Manohar, 1991.

- Hasan, Zoya. *Quest for Power: Oppositional Movements & Post-Congress in Uttar Pradesh*. Delhi: OUP, 1998.
- Hashmi, Taj ul-Islam. *Pakistan as a Peasant Utopia: The Communalization of Class Politics in East Bengal, 1920-1947*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1992.
- Israel, Milton. *Communications and Power: Propaganda and the Press in the Indian Nationalist Struggle, 1920-1947*. Cambridge: CUP, 1994.
- Jaffrelot, Christophe. "Des nationalistes en quête d'une nation. Les partis nationalistes hindous au XXème siècle," Ph.D., Institut d'Études Politiques, Paris, 1991
- _____. *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.
- Jalal, Ayesha. *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850*. London: Routledge, 2000.
- _____. *The Sole Spokesman. Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*. Cambridge South Asian Studies. London: CUP, 1985.
- _____. *The State of Martial Rule: The Origins of Pakistan's Political Economy of Defence*. Cambridge: CUP, 1990.
- Jha, Shashishekhar. *Political Elite in Bihar*. Bombay: Vora, 1972.
- Jones, Kenneth W. *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in Nineteenth Century Punjab*. Berkeley: University of California Press 1976.
- _____. *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India: The New Cambridge History of India*. III, 1. Cambridge: CUP, 1989.
- Joshi, Shashi and Bhagwan Josh. *Struggle for Hegemony in India 1920-47*. 3 vols. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1992-94.
- Karunakaran, K.P. *Religion and Political Awakening in India*. Meerut: Meenakshi Prakashan, 1965.
- Keer, Dhananjay. *Veer Savarkar*. Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1966.
- King, Christopher. *One Language, Two Scripts. The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India*. Oxford: OUP, 1994.
- Kogekar, S.V. and Richard L. Park, eds. *Reports on the Indian*

- General Elections 1951-52.* Bombay: Indian Political Science Association, Popular Book Depot, 1956.
- Lal, Shiv. *Sectarian Politics in India and Pakistan since 1857. A History of Divisive Forces at Play in the Sub-Continent during 100 years.* New Delhi: The Election Archives, 1971.
- Limaye, Madhu. *Indian National Movement: Its ideological and Socio-Economic Dimensions.* New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1989.
- Low, D.A. *Britian and Indian Nationalism: The imprint of Ambiguity, 1929-1942.* Cambridge: CUP, 1997.
- Ludden, David, ed. *Contesting the Nation: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy in India.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996.
- Madhok, Balraj. *Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee: A Biography.* 1969 edition. Bombay: Jaico House, 1969.
- _____. *Political Trends in India.* Delhi: S. Chand & Co., 1959.
- _____. *Portrait of a Martyr: Biography of Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerji.* Bombay: Jaico, 1969
- Mahajan, Sucheta. *Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000.
- Malgonkar, Manohar. *The Men who Killed Gandhi.* London: MacMillan, 1978.
- Malhotra, S.L. *Gandhi: an Experiment with Communal Politics. (A Study of Gandhi's Role in Punjab Politics, 1922-1931).* Chandigarh: Panjab University Publication Bureau, 1975.
- Malkani, K.R. *The RSS Story.* New Delhi: Impex, 1980.
- Markovits, Claude. *The Global World of Indian Merchants, 1750-1947: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama.* Cambridge: CUP, 2000.
- _____. *Indian Business and Nationalist Politics 1931-1939. The Indigenous Capitalist Class and the Rise of the Congress Party.* Cambridge South Asian Studies. Cambridge: CUP, 1985.

- Mathur, Sobhag. *Hindu Revivalism and the Indian National Movement: A Documentary Study of the Ideals and Policies of the Hindu Mahasabha, 1939-45*. Jodhpur: Kusumanjali Prakashan, 1996.
- Mayaram, Shail. *Resisting Regimes: Myth, Memory and the Shaping of Muslim Identity*. Delhi: OUP, 1997.
- McKean, Lise. *Divine Enterprise: Gurus and the Hindu Nationalist Movement*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Meadowcroft, Keith. "From 'Hindu-Muslim Unity' to 'Hindu Raj': The Evolution of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha, 1922-1939. MA. diss., Concordia University, Montreal, 1995.
- Mehta, Asoka. *The Political Mind of India: An Analysis of the Results of the General Elections*. Bombay: Madhu Limaye for the Socialist Party, 1952.
- Mendelsohn, Oliver and Marika Vicziany. *The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty and the State in Modern India*. Contemporary South Asia, 4. Cambridge: CUP, 1998.
- Menon, V.P. *The Transfer of Power in India*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1957.
- _____. *The Story of the Integration of the States*. London: Longmans, 1956.
- Metcalf, Thomas. *Ideologies of the Raj: The New Cambridge History of India III*, 4. Cambridge: CUP, 1994.
- Minault, Gail. *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India*. Studies in Oriental Culture, Number 16. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.
- Misra, B.B. *The Indian Political Parties. An Historical Analysis of Political Behaviour up to 1947*. Bombay: OUP, 1976.
- Moore, R.J. *The Crisis of Indian Unity, 1917-40*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974.
- Morris-Jones, W.H. *The Government and Politics of India*. London: Hutchinson University Library, 1971.
- Mosley, Leonard. *The Last Days of the Raj*. London: Weidenfeld, 1961.
- Muhammad, Shan. *The Growth of Muslim Politics in India (1900-1919)*. New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1991.

- Nanda, B.R. *Gandhi, Pan-Islamism, Imperialism and Nationalism in India*. Bombay: OUP, 1989.
- Nayar, Balder Raj. *Minority Politics in the Punjab*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966.
- Omvedt, Gail. *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India*. New Delhi: Sage, 1994.
- Ouwerkerk, Louise. *No Elephants for the Maharaja: Social and Political Change in the Princely State of Travancore (1921-1947)*. New Delhi: Manohar, 1994.
- Owen, H.F. *The Indian Nationalist Movement, c. 1912-1922: Leadership, Organization and Philosophy*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1990.
- Padmasha, Dr. *Indian National Congress and the Muslims. 1928-1947*. New Delhi: Rajesh Publications, 1980.
- Page, David. *Prelude to Partition. The Indian Muslims and the Imperial System of Control 1920-1932*. Delhi: OUP, 1982.
- Pandey, Gyanendra. *The Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh 1926-1934. A Study in Imperfect Mobilization*. Delhi: OUP, 1978.
- _____. *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*. Delhi: OUP, 1992.
- _____. ed.. *Hindus and Others: The Question of Identity in India Today*. New Delhi: Viking, 1993.
- _____. ed. *The Indian Nation in 1942*. Calcutta: Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, 1988.
- _____. *Memory, History and the Question of Violence: Reflections on the Reconstruction of Partition; S.G. Deuskar Lectures on Indian History and Culture, 1995*. Calcutta: Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, 1999.
- _____. *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India*. Cambridge: CUP, 2001.
- Panikkar, K.N., ed. *Communalism in India: History, Politics and Culture*. New Delhi: Manohar, 1991.
- Parmanand. *Mahamana Madan Mohan Malaviya: An Historical Biography*. 2 vols.

- Varanasi: Benares Hindu University, 1985.
- Patra, Kishori Mohan. *Orissa State Legislature and Freedom Struggle*. New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research: 1979.
- Philips, C.H. and M.D. Wainwright, eds. *The Partition of India. Policies and Perspectives 1935-1947*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970.
- Prakash, Indra. *Hindu Mahasabha: Its Contribution to India's Politics*. New Delhi: B.C. Chatterjee, Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha, 1966.
- Rai, Satya M. *Legislative Politics and Freedom Struggle on the Punjab 1897-1947*. New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research, 1984.
- Ramana Rao, M.V. *Development of the Congress Constitution*. New Delhi: All India Congress Committee, 1958.
- Reeves, Peter. *Landlords and Governments in Uttar Pradesh: a Study of their Relations until Zamindari Abolition*. Bombay: OUP, 1991.
- Reeves, P.D., B.D. Graham and J.M. Goodman. *Elections in Uttar Pradesh, 1920-1951*. Delhi: Manohar, 1975.
- Robinson, Francis. *Separatism among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims, 1860-1923*. Cambridge South Asian Studies. London: CUP, 1974.
- Rubin, Barnett R. *Feudal Revolt and State-Building: The 1938 Sikar Agitation in Jaipur*. New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 1983.
- Rudolph, Susanne Hoeber and Lloyd I. Rudolph. *Essays on Rajputana: Reflections on History, Culture and Administration*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing, 1984.
- Rumbold, Algernon. *Watershed in India. 1914-1922*. London: Athlone Press, 1979.
- Sarkar, Kamala. *Bengal Politics, 1937-1947*. Calcutta: Mukherjee & Co., 1990.
- Sarkar, Sumit. *Modern India, 1885-1947*. 2nd ed. New York: St. Martins Press, 1989.
- Sarkar, Tanika and Urvashi Butalia, eds., *Women and the Hindu Right: A Collection of Essays*, (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1995)
- Sen, S.P., ed. *Dictionary of National Biography*, 4 vols. Calcutta: Institute of Historical Studies, 1972-1974.
- Seunarine, J.F. *Reconversion to Hinduism through Shuddhi*. Madras: Christian

- Literature Society, 1977.
- Singh, Anita Inder. *The Origins of the Partition of India 1936-1947*. Delhi: OUP, 1987.
- Shaikh, Farzana. *Community and Consensus in Islam. Muslim Representation in Colonial India, 1860-1947*. Cambridge South Asian Studies. Cambridge: CUP, 1989.
- Sitaramayya, B.P. *The History of the Indian National Congress (1885-1935)*. Madras: The Working Committee of the Congress, 1935.
- Smith, Donald E. *India as a Secular State*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963.
- Smith, W.C. *Modern Islam in India*. 1946 ed. Reprinted at Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1963.
- Talbot, Ian. *Freedom's Cry: The Popular Dimension in the Pakistan Movement and Partition Experience in North-West India*. Karachi: OUP, 1996.
- _____. *Inventing the Nation: India and Pakistan*. London: Arnold, 2000.
- _____. *Provincial Politics and the Pakistan movement. The Growth of the Muslim League in North-West and North-East India 1937-1947*. New York: OUP, 1988.
- Taylor, David and Malcolm Yapp, eds. *Political Identity in South Asia*. Collected Papers on South Asia, No. 2. London: Curzon Press, 1979.
- Tendulkar, D.G. *Mahatma—Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, Revised Edition, Vol. 8, (Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, GOI, 1963).
- Thakur, D. *Politics of Land Reforms in India*. New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers, 1989.
- Thapar, Romil, Harbansh Mukhiya, and Bipan Chandra. *Communalism and Writing of Indian History*. Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1969.
- Thomas, Antony. *Mahatma Gandhi and the Communal Problem. From the Khilafat Movement to Quit India*. New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1983.
- Tomlinson, B.R. *The Indian National Congress and the Raj: The Penultimate Phase, 1929-42*. London: MacMillan, 1976.
- Thursby, G.R. *Hindu-Muslim Relations in British India. A Study of Controversy, Conflict, and Communal Movements in Northern India, 1923-1928*. Leiden,

- Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1975.
- Vakil, A.K. *Gandhi-Ambedkar Dispute*. New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1991.
- van der Veer, Peter. *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
- Voigt, Johannes H. *India in the Second World War*. New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1987.
- Wainwright, A. Martin *Inheritance of Empire: Britain, India and the Balance of Power in Asia, 1938-55*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1994.
- Weiner, Myron. *Party Politics in India: The Development of a Multi-Party System*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957.
- Zelliot, Eleanor. *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar movement*. New Delhi: Manohar, 1992.

Articles in Journals and Books

- Abid, Massarrat and Qalb-i-Abid. "Pakistan Resolution and Hindu Mahasabha." *Pakistan Resolution Revisited*. Ed. Kaniz F. Yusuf, et al. Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1990. 331-346.
- Alter, Joseph. "Somatic Nationalism: Indian Wrestling and Militant Hinduism." *MAS* 28 (1994): 557-588.
- Andersen, Walter. "The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh." 4 parts, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 11, 18 and 25 March, and 1 April 1972: 589-597, 633-640, 673-682 and 724-727.
- Carol Bacchi, "Race Regeneration and Social Purity: A Study of the Social Attitudes of Canada's English-Speaking Suffragists," *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, 11 (1978): 460-474.
- Baker, D.E.U. "The Changing Leadership of the Congress in the Central Provinces and Berar, 1919-39." *Congress and the Raj. Facets of the Indian Struggle 1917-47*. Ed. D.A. Low. London: Heineman, 1977. 225-257.
- _____. "The Muslim Concern for Security: The Central Provinces and Berar, 1919-1947." *Communal and Pan-Islamic Trends in Colonial India*. 2nd ed. Ed. Mushirul Hasan. New Delhi: Manohar, 1985. 221-247.
- Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar. "Transfer of Power and the Crisis of Dalit Politics in India, 1945-47." *MAS* 34 (2000):
- Barrier, N. Gerald. "The Arya Samaj and Congress Politics in the Punjab, 1894-1908." *JAS* 26 (1967): 363-379.
- _____. "The Punjab Government and Communal Politics, 1870-1908." *JAS* 27 (1968): 523-539.
- _____. "Regional Political History: New Trends in the Study of British India." *Region and Nation in India*. Ed. Paul Wallace. New Delhi: Oxford and IBH Publishing Co., 1985. 111-152.
- Bayly, C.A. "Patrons and Politics in Northern India." *Locality, Province and Nation: Essays on Indian Politics, 1870-1930*. Ed. J. Gallagher and A. Seal. Cambridge; CUP, 1973. 29-68.
- _____. "The Pre-History of Communalism? Religious Conflict in

India 1700-1860." *MAS* 19.2 (1985): 177-203.

Bhattacharya, H. "Post-Partition Refugees and the Communists: A Comparative Study of West Bengal and Tripura." *Region and Partition: Bengal, Punjab and the Partition of the Subcontinent*. Ed. Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh. Karachi: OUP, 1999.

Brass, Paul. "Elite Group, Symbol Manipulation and Ethnic Identity Among the Muslims of South Asia." *Political Identity in South Asia*. Ed. David and Malcolm Yapp. London: Curzon Press, 1979. 35-77.

Chakrabarty, Bidyut. "The 1947 United Bengal Movement: A Thesis Without a Synthesis." *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 30 (Oct.-Dec. 1993): 467-488.

Chand, Tara. "Historical origins of the Communal Problem." *Secular Democracy* 7.3-4 (March-April 1974): 67-90

Chatterjee, Joya. "The Making of a Borderline: The Radcliffe Award for Bengal." *Region and Partition: Bengal, Punjab and the Partition of the Subcontinent*. Ed. Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh. Karachi: OUP, 1999.

Chatterjee, Partha. "Agrarian Relations and Communalism in Bengal." *Subaltern Studies* 1. Ed. Ranjit Guha. Oxford University Press, 1982

_____. "Caste and Subaltern Consciousness." *Subaltern Studies* 6 : 169-209.

Cleghorn, B. "Religion and Politics: The Leadership of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha Punjab and Maharashtra, 1920- 1939." *Leadership in South Asia*. Ed. B.N. Pandey. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1977. 395-425.

Copland, Ian. "Congress Paternalism: The 'High Command' and the Struggle for Freedom in Princely India c. 1920-1940," *South Asia*, V. 8 (1985): 121-140.

_____. "'Communalism' in Princely India: The Case of Hyderabad, 1930-1940." *MAS* 22 (1988): 783-814.

_____. "The Princely States, the Muslim League and the Partition of India in 1947," *The International History Review*, 13 (1991): 38-69.

_____. "The Further Shores of Partition: Ethnic Cleansing in Rajasthan 1947." *Past and Present*, 160 (1998): 203-239.

_____. "Islam and the 'Moral Economy': The Alwar Revolt of 1932." *South Asia* 22 (1999): 109-132.

- D'Souza, Eugene J. "Nazi Propaganda in India." *Social Scientist* (India) 28.5-6 (May-June 2000): 77-90.
- Dixit, Prabha. "The Ideology of Hindu Nationalism." *Political Thought in Modern India*. Ed. Thomas Pantham and Kenneth L. Deutsch. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1986. 122-141.
- Edwin, P.G. "Travancore and Paramount Power—A Study in Wartime Relationship," *Journal of Indian History* 51 (1973): 407-420.
- Embree, Ainslie. "The Function of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh: To Define the Hindu Nation." *Fundamentalisms Observed*. Vol. 4. Ed. M.E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994. 617-652.
- Fox, R.G. "Gandhian Socialism and Hindu Nationalism. Cultural Domination in the World System." *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 25.3 (1987): 233-47.
- _____. "Urban Class and Communal Consciousness in Colonial Punjab: The Genesis of India's Intermediate Regime." *MAS* 18 (1984): 459-89.
- Frykenberg, R.E. The Concept of 'Majority' as a Devilish Force in the Politics of Modern Asia." *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 25.3 (1987): 267-274.
- _____. "The Emergence of Modern Hinduism as a Concept and as an Institution: A Reappraisal with Special Reference to South India." *Hinduism Reconsidered*. Ed. Gunther D. Sontheimer and Hermann Kulke. New Delh, Manohar: 1991
- Gallagher, John. "Congress in Decline: Bengal 1930-39." *Locality, Province and Nation: Essays on Indian Politics, 1870-1930*. Ed. J. Gallagher and A. Seal. Cambridge; CUP, 1973. 29-68.
- _____, and Anil Seal. "Britain and India Between the Wars." *MAS* 15 (1981): 387-414.
- Ghosh, Papiya. "Articulating Community Rights: The Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha in Congress Bihar, 1937-39." *South Asia* 14 (1991):
- Gold, D. "Organized Hinduisms: From Vedic Truth to Hindu Nation." *Fundamentalisms Observed*. Vol. 1. Ed. M.E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991. 531-593.

- Gondhalekar, Nandini and Sanjoy Bhattacharya, "The All-India Hindu Mahasabha and the end of British rule in India, 1939-1947," *Social Scientist*, V. 27, 1999: 48-74
- Gordon, Leonard A. "Divided Bengal: Problems of Nationalism and Identity in the 1947 Partition." *India's Partition. Process, Strategy and Mobilization*. Ed. Mushirul Hasan. Delhi: OUP, 1993. 274-317.
- Gordon, Richard. "The Hindu Mahasabha and the Indian National Congress, 1915 to 1926." *MAS* 9 (1975): 145-203.
- Gould, William "Congress Radicals and Hindu Militancy: Sampurnanand and Purushottam Das Tandon in the Politics of the United Provinces, 1930-1947," *MAS* 36 (2002): 619-655.
- Graham, B.D. "'The Congress and Hindu Nationalism.'" *The Indian National Congress: Centenary Hindsight*. Ed. D.A. Low. Delhi: OUP, 1988. 170-87.
- _____. "The Prime Minister and the Hindu Right." *Nehru to the Nineties*. Ed. J. Manor. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1994. 186-206.
- _____. "Syama Prasad Mookerjee and the Communalist Alternative." *Soundings in Modern South Asian History*. Ed. D.A. Low. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968. 330-374.
- Guha, Ranjit. "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India." *Subaltern Studies* 1. Ed. Ranjit Guha. OUP, 1982. 1-7.
- Gupta, M.L. "The Hindu Mahasabha: Role and Legacy." *Secular Democracy* 5 (August 1972): 117-121.
- Hasan, Mushirul. "Communal and Revivalist Trends in the Congress." *Communal and Pan-Islamic Trends in Colonial India*. 2nd ed. Ed. M. Hasan. New Delhi: Manohar, 1985. 196-220
- _____. "The Communal Divide: A Study of the Delhi Proposals." *Communal and Pan-Islamic Trends in Colonial India*. 2nd ed. Ed. M. Hasan. New Delhi: Manohar, 1985. 281-301.
- _____. "Congress Muslims and Indian Nationalism, Dilemma and Decline, 1928-1934." *South Asia* ns 8 (1985): 102-120.

- _____. "The Myth of Unity: Colonial and National Narratives."
Contesting the Nation: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy in India. Ed. David Ludden. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996. 185-208.
- _____. "Partition: The Human Cost," *History Today* September 1997: 101-06.
- Heehs, Peter. "Bengali Religious Nationalism and Communalism."
Nationalism, Terrorism, Communalism: Essays in Modern Indian History. Delhi: OUP, 1998.
- Israel, Milton. "Ramanda Chatterjee and the *Modern Review*. The Image of Nationality in the Indian National Press." *National Unity. The South Asian Experience*. Ed. Milton Israel. New Delhi: Promilla, 1983. 1-46.
- Hardiman, David. "The Indian 'Faction': A Political Theory Examined." *Subaltern Studies I*. Ed. Ranjist Guha. OUP, 1982. 198-231.
- Jaffrelot, Christophe. "The Genesis and Development of Hindu Nationalism in the Punjab: From the Arya Samaj to the Hindu Sabha (1875-1910)." *The Indo-British Review* 21.1: 3-39
- _____. "The Idea of Race in the Writings of Hindu Nationalist Ideologues in the 1920s and 1930s: A Concept between Two Cultures." *The Concept of Race in South Asia*. Ed. Peter Robb. Delhi: OUP, 1995.
- _____. "Les (re)conversions a l'hindouisme (1885-1990). Politisation et diffusion d'une 'invention de la tradition'." *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 87 (July-Sept. 1994).
- Jalal, Ayesha. "Secularists, Subalterns and the Stigma of 'Communalism': Partition Historiography Revisited." *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 33.1 (1996): 93-103.
- Jones, Kenneth W. "The Arya Samaj in British India, 1875-1947."
Religion in Modern India. 2nd ed. rev. Ed. Robert D. Baird. New Delhi: Manohar, 1989. 27-54.
- _____. "'Communalism in the Punjab', the Arya Samaj Contribution." *JAS*, 28 (1968): 39-54.
- _____. "Religious Identity and the Indian Census." *The Census in British India. New Perspectives*. Ed. N. Gerald Barrier. New Delhi: Manohar, 1981.

- _____. "Politicized Hinduism: The Ideology and Program of the Hindu Mahasabha." *Religion in Modern India*. Ed. Robert D. Baird. 2nd ed. rev. New Delhi: Manohar, 1989. 239-272.
- Jordens, J.T.F. "Reconversion to Hinduism: The *Shuddhi* of the Arya Samaj." *Religion in South Asia: Religious Conversion and Revival Movements in South Asia in Medieval and Modern times*. Ed. G.A. Oddie. 2nd ed. rev. New Delhi: Manohar, 1991. 95-124.
- Jose, P.K. "Responsivists and Indian National Movement." *Journal of Indian History* 54 (1976): 613-640.
- Krishna, Gopal. "The Development of the Indian National Congress as a Mass Organization, 1918-1923." *Modern India: An Interpretive Anthology*. Ed. Thomas R. Metcalf. Toronto: Macmillan, 1971. 275-272
- Malik, I.H. "Identity Formation and Muslim Party politics in the Punjab, 1897-1936: A Retrospective Analysis." *MAS* 29 (1995): 293-323.
- Meadowcroft, Keith "Trading in religio-political identities?: The 1936 Moonje-Ambedkar Pact," *South Asia Between Turmoil and Hope*, eds. Hugh Johnston et al. Calgary: South Asia Council of Canadian Asian Studies Association and Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute, 2000: 95-130.
- Metcalf, Barbara. "Presidential Address: Too Little and Too Much: Reflections on Muslims in the History of India." *JAS* 54.4 (1995): 951-967.
- Moore, Robin. "Paul Scott and the Partition of India." *India's Partition Preludes and Legacies*. Ed. Ramkant Rajan Mahan,. Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 1998: 95-119.
- Mujeeb, M. "The Partition of India in Retrospect." *The Partition of India. Policies and Perspectives 1935-1947*. Ed. C.H. Philips and M.D. Wainwright. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970. 406-414.
- Nandy, Ashis. "Final Encounter: The Politics of the Assassination of Gandhi." *At the Edge of Psychology*. Oxford: OUP, 1980. 70-98.
- O'Hanlon, Rosalind. "Historical Approaches to Communalism: Perspectives from Western India." *Society and Ideology: Essays in South Asian History*. Ed. Peter Robb. Delhi: 1993.
- Pandey, G. "The Prose of Otherness." *Subaltern Studies VIII. Essays in Honor of Ranajit Guha*. Ed. David Arnold and David Haridman. Delhi: 1994.

- Patniak, Arun and K.S.R.V.S. Chalam. "The Ideology and Politics of Hindutva." *Social Change and Political Discourse in India: Structures of Power, Movements of Resistance*. Vol. 3. Ed. T.V. Sathyamurthy. Delhi: OUP, 1996. 252-280.
- Patterson, Maureen. "The Shifting Fortunes of Chitpavan Brahmins: Focus on 1948." *City, Countryside and Society in Maharashtra*. South Asian Studies Papers 2. Ed. D.W. Attwood, M. Israel and N.K. Wagle. Toronto: Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Toronto, 1988. 35-88.
- Puri, Balraj. "Dogra, Prem Nath," *Dictionary of National Biography*. 4 Vols. Ed. S.P. Sen. Calcutta : Institute of Historical Studies, 1972-74.
- Barbara N. Ramusack, "Punjab States: Maharajas and Gurdwaras: Patiala and the Sikh Community," Robin Jeffrey, ed., *People, Princes and Paramount Power* (Delhi: OUP, 1978)
- Robb, Peter. "The Challenge of Gau Mata: British Policy and Religious Change in India, 1880-1916." *MAS* 20 (1986): 285-319.
- _____. "Muslim Identity and Separatism in India: The Significance of M.A. Ansari." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 54.1 (1991).
- Rothermund, I. "Gandhi and Maharashtra: Nationalism and the Provincial Response." *South Asia* 1 (1971): 56- 73.
- Roy, Asim. "The High Politics of India's Partition: The Revisionist Perspective." Review of *The Sole Spokesman. Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*, by A. Jalal and *Jinnah of Pakistan*, by S. Wolpert. *MAS* 24 (1990): 385-408.
- Sarkar, Sumit. "Indian Nationalism and the Politics of Hindutva." *Contesting the Nation: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy in India*. Ed. David Ludden. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996. 270-293.
- Saxena, N.C. "Historiography of Communalism in India." *Communal and Pan-Islamic Trends in Colonial India*. Ed. Mushirul Hasan. 2nd ed. New Delhi: Manohar, 1985. 320-343.
- Seal, Anil. "Imperialism and Nationalism in India." *Locality, Province and Nation: Essays on Indian Politics, 1870-1930*. Ed. J. Gallagher and A. Seal. Cambridge : CUP, 1973. 1-27.
- Singh, Anita Inder. "The Congress and the Hindu-Muslim Problem 1920-

- 1947." *The Indian National Congress: Centenary Hindsight*. Ed. D.A. Low. Delhi: OUP, 1988. 188-206.
- . "Prospects of Agreement and the Partition of India." In *Oxford University Papers on India*. Vol. 1, part 2. Ed. N.J. Allen et al. Delhi: OUP, 1987. 43-72.
- Singh, N.K. "Congress and Hindu-Muslim Unity." *Secular Democracy* 5 (August 1972): 123-129.
- Smyth, Douglas C. "The Social Basis of Militant Hindu Nationalism." *The Journal of Developing Areas* 6 (1972): 323-344.
- Som, Reba. "J. Nehru and the Hindu Code: A Victory of Symbol over Substance?" *MAS* 28 (1994): 165-94.
- Thapar, Romila. "Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity." *MAS* 23.2 (1989): 209- 31.
- Tucker, Richard. "Hindu Traditionalism and Nationalist Ideologies in 19th Century Maharashtra." *MAS* 10.3 (1976): 321-348.
- Upadhyaya, Prakash Chandra. "The Politics of Indian Secularism." *MAS* 26 (1992): 815-53.
- Zelliot, Eleanor. "The Psychological Dimension of the Buddhist Movement in India." *Religion in South Asia: Religious Conversion and Revival Movements in South Asia in Medieval and Modern Times*. Ed. G.A. Oddie. Delhi: Manohar, 1991.